**Christianity – Is it Plausible?**

The Story They Don’t Tell You at Church

**Introduction**

Welcome to Christianity – Is It Plausible? If I was writing a contemporary new age or religious book I might say something like, “This book was written for you and it is perfect that you should come to it at this exact moment in your life, some might say it is fate, that is, a Fortuitous And Timely Emergence…” I might also make another claim that I’ve noticed has become especially popular of late, “This book is not just words on paper, but rather I’ve composed the text in a special way that allows the information contained within to bypass the thinking, clinical part of your brain and activate the latent spirituality within you as you read. All you have to do is read and be open…”

Please!

It is not without some embarrassment that I relay to you I was once someone who would have accepted the above comments. Fortunately for me, and you, I am not that person anymore and this is not one of those books. So who am I and what kind of book is this?

Just Who do I Think I am Anyway?

Don’t worry, I don’t have pages of boring experiences to put you to sleep with, but I do have hopefully relevant information to help you understand me so that as your author you can relate to my book a little better.

I am just a normal person like you, your annoying younger brother, your older sister, or even your boyfriend or girlfriend. I have a degree in information systems (but make no mistake, I am far from a computer savvy IT guru) and a graduate diploma (essentially the equivalent of a degree) in philosophy. I have worked as an accountant, a sales rep, a caregiver and an English teacher in Korea (my current occupation at the time of writing). I don’t have any special qualifications or abilities and have basically summed up my life in a depressingly average paragraph.

What I am is a guy who has been actively meditating regularly and deeply interested in spiritual matters for the past ten years. My book collection is heavily (very heavily) slanted towards the “new age” genre and this subject has completely captivated my attention for more than a decade.

Fortunately, I finally realised that I was chasing a pipe dream. Everything ‘amazing’ that I have ever experienced came from ink on paper and the ‘experiences’ of other people; people I have never met. My life has not in any way been touched by anything that could be called ‘spiritual’ or ‘religious.’ Now, as someone who has tried damn hard to experience something spiritual and who has truly believed in something beyond the physical, I come to you as a firm non-believer.

My father believed in Christianity but my mother was never really interested in religious matters. I attended Sunday school while my father went to church (we only attended once every two or three weeks) until I was about thirteen, I always like to say until I was old enough to start thinking for myself. At that time I realised that religion (at least Christianity) was a false path leading nowhere, so I immediately abandoned it and never returned. I looked at Taoism and Buddhism for some time in my mid-twenties but eventually found the same trappings which turned me from Christianity. I also flirted with tai chi and qi gong before coming to the same conclusion.

While completely rejecting religion and all forms of organised spirituality I always maintained a personal attitude of belief in some grand force and kept up a fair meditation regime (most of the time anyway, I cringe when I think of the years I have spent with my eyes closed trying to find something beyond our normal senses that would somehow complete my life). And then, one day not too long ago, I came to the realisation that I had absolutely nothing to show for all of this time, nothing at all. God never moved me, He never touched me, I never slipped into the “infinite force” or experienced an expanded awareness... absolutely nothing. I could have learnt a new language, earned a couple of masters’ degrees, or just slept for an extra thirty minutes each morning for ten years. I resolved not to waste my life in such foolish pursuits anymore.

My spirituality had faded a couple of times during that ten year period but each time it did, I began to feel a sense of longing for something more and the belief would always return. At those times I took that to mean that my soul/spirit/higher self or whatever else people are calling it these days, was yearning for completeness and drawing me to it. But despite that, nothing changed. Disappointment continued to dog my efforts.

Upon reflection I think that my failure lay in my sensible, pragmatic nature. I would never accept things too easily and even though the bigger part of me wanted to believe, like some of my like-minded friends, I just couldn’t get rid of a nagging voice in the back of my mind that told me their ‘proofs’ were just coincidences or the stories in the latest book on ‘reaching out to your inner self’ were really not much more than the results of an overactive imagination. I always remember a timely event that came once while I was meditating with some friends. We finished our session and were talking about it when one guy told me that he had seen a flash of a strobe-like light behind his closed eyelids. He said it happened a couple of times and each time, he opened his eyes looking for the source but could see nothing. He was quite excited about it and expressed his awe and curiosity as to the cause of this “strobing in his brain.” He continued his story. He said that he kept meditating and as he was doing so he (unintentionally but with conscious awareness of his position) leaned slightly forward and the strobe effect came again. When he opened his eyes this time, he found that from this slightly different position a streetlight outside the window just came into his line of sight and it was this that had been causing his “mental strobing.” I was strongly reminded of how we explain situations and events by forcing them to match our belief systems and that when we want to see or experience something, our minds can take us on long, wild goose chases while making us think they are real.

At any rate, after all of these years of frustration and futile searching, I finally concluded that the longing I was experiencing need not actually come from a mystical higher self, but could just be a normal, psychological fear of dying or a fear of being alone. Exactly what I had always thought drew people to religions. This realisation shook me to the core and woke me up almost overnight. I was a born-again materialist. Never again would I chase fairies, unless they actually came and spoke to me, and even then I would remain highly sceptical and tend to favour the notion that I was going crazy rather than experiencing a higher dimension or meeting angels from God. As Carl Sagan famously said, “Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.” The more outrageous a claim, the more suspicious and wary we must be if we are to avoid falling prey to fantasies and delusions.

So, What Kind of Book is This?

If you haven’t realised it from the title and my self-introduction, this book is essentially about atheism with a particular focus on Christianity, just because it is the religion I am most familiar with. But many of the points in the second part can be easily generalised to apply to other religions or spiritual movements. If the points themselves don’t translate, then certainly the ideas and ways of thinking which underlie them do.

As I mentioned earlier I don’t have any special qualifications or skills so why should you take my word for any of this? Well, to be honest, you shouldn’t. You should read it and think about it and if you like it, take it on board, if you don’t, chuck it in the bin or return it and try to get a refund. Although as an author I definitely don’t recommend that last option. I maintain that I am just a normal person like you and as such this is a simple, real, down-to-earth exposition of my own thoughts. That’s what makes this book different from others written by authors with years of research experience and qualifications behind them and I believe it’s a positive thing because I’m still in touch with the simple things that actually work. I’m not lost in academia or mountains of research, ideas, opinions, articles and theses. Call it grass-roots atheism.

As a direct result of this, I believe my arguments and ideas are all easy to grasp and readily accessible to anyone. By this, I mean that you don’t have to accept my word for anything. I’m not going to refer to any obscure scientific experiment proving this or that (you don’t need to be a physicist or biologist to follow my arguments), or resort to any convoluted reasoning to defend my ideas because I believe the longer an explanation and the more steps involved, the more fallacious it necessarily must be (you don’t need to make any leaps of faith). There could almost be a scientific rule here, “the fallaciousness (F) of a theory is directly proportional to the mental gymnastics (MG) involved in explaining that theory” or F = MG2.

I am reminded of a conversation I had with a Christian friend when I was about fifteen years old which illustrates this convoluted reasoning (convoluted because it’s fictitious) to explain something. I asked my friend if God is supposed to be everywhere and is supposed to be all good, how can the devil and evil exist anywhere? He began to explain to me how it’s possible for two entities (even diametrically opposite entities) to *co-exist* in the same space at the same time. To his credit he did give it a fair go, but all he succeeded in proving to me was that commonsense and reason will never overcome mindless faith.

Obviously my friend’s ‘theory’ (and I do use the term loosely) was completely fallacious and that is how it sounded, even to my young fifteen year old ears, and is exactly the kind of reasoning I will not even bother defending or attacking in this book and I will *definitely* *not* be employing it to prove a point. If you are someone who likes to explain things with complicated, pseudo-scientific mumbo-jumbo, then this book may disappoint you, because I have no time for any of that. You need to be a rocket scientist to understand rocket science but you don’t need to be a rocket science to understand religion. If you needed a PhD to understand religion, it would be worthless as a means of universal salvation.

Another example is from a book (which was nevertheless an excellent read) which claimed that some mathematical principle supposedly confirmed by scientists and mathematicians, proved that life didn’t need anything or anyone to kick-start the process. It went on to explain something about randomness and maybe chaos theory; I honestly don’t know, I didn’t understand it. The author was definitely making a wonderful point which I’m certain I believe, but the abstract and highly technical discussion was just too much for me. I wasn’t reading that book to learn complicated algorithms that have absolutely no immediate reference point for me. I wanted to know why the author disbelieved religion. The most convincing reasons are those that don’t attempt to stun the reader with a barrage of semi-scientific, (or even genuinely scientific) “experts say” points. This kind of reasoning is definitely absent from this book.

Everything I claim from this point on can be confirmed by you, the reader, with a little simple research and light reading or more usually just by using your own common sense. In fact, I feel that common sense is our greatest ally when it comes to the minefield of spirituality and religion. It always amazes me how ordinarily intelligent and sensible people transform themselves into mindless, dogma-lapping zombies as soon as they enter a church or temple. As soon as they walk through the door they leave their commonsense outside and begin praising someone/something they have never met, seen, heard, or experienced through any sensory means as though he/she/it were a proven fact.

There is one thing that I am going to ask of you and if you are not prepared to do it then you are not prepared to read this book. I ask you to pick up your commonsense wherever you may have inadvertently left it and carry it with you like a sidearm as we enter this foray. If you are about rejecting commonsense, and accepting something as true because someone else says it is (be that person me, your local Buddhist monk or the Pope); this book will not help you in any way, shape or form. Put it on the shelf (I’ve still advise against returning it) until such time as you are ready to get real and face the facts, naked as it were, without your armour of beliefs sheltering you from reality.

To sum up, this is a book about Atheism (with a focus on Christianity) written by a normal, thinking man (me) for the normal, thinking person (you).

What am I Trying to Achieve With This Book?

This book is not an attempt to convert anyone to atheism or deflect anyone from their chosen religion; (such a task I accept as impossible) it is simply aimed at contributing to the growing mass of information out there, so that thinking, discerning people can make well-informed decisions concerning religion. I am not naive enough to think that hardcore believers will change their minds, as much as I would like to ‘save’ them and see everyone lead meaningful, illusion-free lives.

I hope that this book reaches the hands of people who are open-minded enough to consider the possibility that religion is not the answer to all their problems and instead brings with it a whole host of other problems to their plate. Isn’t it funny that I should word that last sentence that way? *Open-minded enough to consider* ***not*** *believing in talking snakes, burning bushes, a terrible horned creature in a mythical place called Hell or a great magical being who created the Universe and will judge us all one day to choose those who will spend eternity with Him in a wonderful paradise*. How twisted have things become that it could be considered open-minded to *not* believe in these things?

These days it seems like sensible, practical ideas are almost taboo but if you preach religious doctrine you are free to rant for as long as you like to whomever you like. I wonder what Jehovah’s Witnesses would think if I started knocking on their doors offering to save them from their evil, religious ways? I don’t mean to suggest that we don’t have the freedom of speech that we so cherish but there are certainly groups out there that work to keep ideas and thoughts different to their own silenced. It’s funny how religious ideas and institutions are to a certain extent protected from secular criticism, but they regularly and happily attack science from every imaginable angle while proclaiming to all who will listen that such blasphemers will roast in hell for all of eternity.

We have certainly come a long way from the dark ages where heresy was a crime punishable by death. I love that word by the way, ‘heresy.’ I can just imagine the church leaders getting together and discussing it. “We can’t have people believing in things other than Christianity, but we can’t call ‘freedom of thought’ a crime, can we?” “Hey, I know! How about ‘heresy’? It kind of sounds official…”

How perverted is it that freedom of thought can be made into a crime? And that’s literally what heresy is – having an opinion or teaching a doctrine at odds with that of the Church.

Anyway, where was I? Ah, that’s right, we have come a long way since then but, like a thorn in our collective side or a virus in our collective system, religion has retained a firm grip on our consciousness and insidiously plagues us. It has lost a lot of power with the rise of science and individual freedom but has kept its ‘holy’ status, and to many people is still beyond reproach.

We need to remember that religion has not been given to us direct from God. Sure, the stories claim that God and various prophets have come to Earth and taught our distant ancestors but, let’s face the facts, we obviously can’t prove any of this and if we’re being honest with ourselves it is all nothing more than hearsay and myth. Essentially, religion is nothing more than an idea conceived of by humans, for other humans. All books about it have been written by humans, all speeches made about it have been made by humans and all thoughts about it have been thought by humans… and they are prolific humans, are they not? Go into a bookstore and there will be several shelves and entire sections devoted to religion. In that same bookstore you may also be able to find a handful of titles endorsing the opposite.

With this book I am trying to join the ranks of those ‘sinners’ and ‘misguided souls’ daring to give opposition to the church and other organised groups of a similar nature. It is my hope that a down-to-earth book with down-to-earth ideas can make a difference in a few down-to-earth people’s lives.

I see religion as, at best a pair of rose coloured glasses that colour and tint the wearer’s perception and at worst as an opaque veil drawn over the head of an unwitting individual that completely prevents clear perception. I aim to prevent that veil from coming down in the first place but if I can’t do that, I hope to at least provide a tool people can use to free themselves when they are ready to. As I said earlier, I am not under any illusions that I will convert anyone to atheism but when someone is ready to ask questions and really listen to the answers, this book will be waiting for them. (On your shelf at home, not in the bookshop!)

What Can Atheism do For Me?

Before we begin with the book proper, I would also like to spend a few minutes clarifying what I mean when I talk about atheism. It is one of those words that easily lends itself to misinterpretation and misunderstandings.

When I use the word, ‘atheism,’ I am defining a philosophy or system of thought which excludes belief in religious entities/fables that have no supporting evidence or which cannot be reasonably inferred through simple, commonsense logic. It is the *absence* of a belief in God/s.

An atheist, contrary to common opinion in some corners of the world, is an intelligent, sensible human being who has usually investigated the subject of religion very carefully and rejected it as being little more than a myth on steroids. Atheists are not ignorant buffoons incapable of understanding religion, who wind up denying it based on faulty information and poor or incomplete reasoning. In fact, quite the opposite is true. Many atheists have closely scrutinised more than one religion, usually in much more detail than other believers, and have frequently been followers of one or more faiths at some point in their lives.

The reality of atheism is that it is a club full of members who are extremely well-versed in the doctrines, dogma and sacred texts of religions. They are the people who dug deeper than the others in their church or temple or synagogue and were prepared to ask and actively search for answers to the hard questions. Perhaps more importantly, they are also the people who weren’t afraid to face those answers when they came up, even if they may not have been the answers they were hoping for or expecting to find. They are the brave souls who have stood up to the Great Oz before them and dared to look behind the curtain while their cowardly lion contemporaries covered their faces with their paws and prayed for things to work out alright.

Atheists are also not close-minded, mechanical robots of science who coldly and unemotionally read and think about sacred texts in the ‘wrong way,’ that is, with an analysing mind instead of a receptive one. Too many people think that the ‘sacred’ can only be understood when glimpsed through the framework of a believing ‘spirit’ (whatever that is) rather than a questioning mind.

It is true that atheists are analytical and reluctant to accept explanations without adequate evidence. Of course, that’s hardly a worthy criticism against them. I consider their analytical, questioning attitude their greatest strength, for very often truth-seeking requires just such a detached, objective perspective. Naturally, the notion that atheists are cold, embittered, unfeeling humans is completely false. We don’t need God to appreciate a sunset and who can resist being moved by contemplation of the unfathomable universe in which we are just a speck on a speck, whether it was designed or not.

Some people feel that atheism is one step away from Satanism, but this is clearly not true. I actually consider Christianity to be one step away from Satanism. Let me explain.

Atheism maintains a disbelief in any religious entity lacking evidence or logical support. God is one such entity, Jesus (as the son of God/God) is another, and the Devil is a third. Atheists don’t believe in any of these characters. There is no more danger of an atheist turning to the “dark side” as it were, than there is of him or her turning to the light. Both are equally implausible.

Christianity, on the other hand already believes in the Devil by default. It is for this reason that I believe Christianity to be closer to Satanism. There is a commonality between the two, the belief in both God and the Devil. In fact, the Devil plays a pivotal role in Christianity. Without him, the whole fear motivation of burning in Hell for all eternity disappears. Where there was once the lure of the carrot and the threat of the stick, there is now just the carrot and it is a carrot that is a long, long way off. It is, in fact, not even in this lifetime. I’m not sure that without the stick, as many Christians would be quite as excited about Christianity as they are today.

This is the way I picture the situation (C is Christianity, A is atheism and S is Satanism):

The Religious View The Secular View

C

C A S

A

S

In the religious model, Christianity and Satanism lie at polar extremes and atheism lies in between, but drifting ever closer to that dreaded S. In my secular view, Christianity and Satanism are still at polar extremes of the bar but their similarity is now also acknowledged and easily seen with the horseshoe shaped curve. Atheism actually stands not so much somewhere in the middle anymore, but on the opposite side of the dividing line, clearly taking an interest in neither.

Atheism is often mistaken for a gross, incorrect form of materialism. People often think of materialists (and atheists) as people who don’t believe in anything they can’t experience through one of the five physical senses. This is false.

Materialism is a philosophical theory that regards matter as constituting the entire universe and all its phenomena, including those of the mind, as being reducible to matter and its motions. Atheism on the other hand is a position of scepticism regarding the existence of a supernatural being (or beings). So, while materialism and atheism often go hand in hand, they are totally distinct categories each with a completely different focus.

Of course, it is theoretically possible to be a materialist but not an atheist, that is to say, hold a belief that everything is composed of matter, including God; or an atheist but not a materialist, meaning a belief that there is some kind of immaterial or supernatural realm but no corresponding deity inhabiting it.

I consider myself to be a materialist, that is, I believe that all things can be explained with reference to matter and its motions, simply because there is a lot of very strong evidence in favour of it, while there is really none for the opposite spiritual, supernatural or metaphysical claims. Everything we know of is made of matter and governed by its interactions and despite the hundreds of thousands of religious or extrasensory claims out there, not a single one has produced anything even remotely close to compelling evidence. If it had, belief in God or ESP would be as ubiquitous as the belief in atoms.

A Christian might make the mistake in thinking that an atheist doesn’t believe in God because she can’t see Him or touch Him. They might then go on to question how this atheist can believe in atoms even though she’s never seen one. Liberated from our false, narrow definition of materialism, (“You only believe in what you see”) we can allow that enough verifiable, repeatable evidence has been gathered and extensively tested regarding atoms and their sub-atomic constituents, protons, neutrons, electrons, for the balance of probabilities to have well and truly shifted in favour of their material existence. She (our atheist) can also believe in viruses and black holes and Pluto (whether it qualifies as a planet or not), despite the fact that she’s never seen them, for exactly the same reasons.

Remember that materialism is not about *actually* seeing or touching an object/event, but rather a question of the constitution of the object/event. Is it just another, natural part of the physical universe or is it something *super*natural? Needless to say, everything we have ever discovered has been made of matter and despite various flights of fancy concocted by imaginative and overzealous believers, this position has not once been seriously challenged.

The Christian was partly correct in assuming that the atheist doesn’t believe in God because she can’t physically sense Him, but that was only half the story. If the evidence was strong for His existence, she might be (I certainly would be) willing to amend her strict materialist beliefs in light of the new facts. Sadly, for Christianity, no such facts have ever surfaced and they’ve had a good two thousand years to do so.

Some people feel that atheism has nothing positive to offer. By that, I mean that it is a reactionary, negative belief, espousing no principles of its own, merely aiming to shoot down those principles formulated by religion. This in partly true, but is also incomplete.

It is true that atheism has arisen in response to religion and in a very real sense wouldn’t exist without religion. When asked which came first, religion or atheism, the answer seems to be, quite clearly, religion, in part because atheism is defined by religion. As such, you might be tempted to think that this relegates atheism to a useless or merely reactionary system of thought.

Consider this. Peace movements don’t exist unless war breaks out but no one thinks peace is useless. This is because peace is the natural state in the absence of war. War is the actor and so peace is called in as the re-actor. Without religious dogma being fed to the masses, atheism (as the *absence* of belief in a deity) must naturally abound and so is, like peace, the reactionary philosophy of the pair. And yet this reactionary role doesn’t diminish its importance in the slightest.

It is also a mistake to think that atheism has no values of its own to promote.[[1]](#footnote-2) True, atheism spends a lot of time dissecting and analysing religious arguments and texts but it does so in the pursuit of a nobler goal than just undermining those beliefs. Atheism is, at bottom, a system which when embraced, assists individuals in shedding cumbersome, childish illusions and advocates the pursuit of meaningful endeavours which will make a difference, if in no one else’s life, at least in the life of the person concerned.

What could be more wasteful than spending a lifetime praying to a God who doesn’t exist? Think of all the days, months or even years devoted to a fiction. Think of the life you defined by your thoughts, words and actions, in terms of a fairytale. Your personal philosophy and belief system (which everyone has, by the way, even if you don’t think of yourself as a philosopher) is **the single, most important** thing you will ever construct. Isn’t it worth investing a bit of time to make sure it’s worthwhile?

I once asked a Christian friend of mine how she reconciled the two different creation stories in Genesis. Her reply; “Are there two?” I also asked how she, as a woman, could believe in a religion that was so overtly sexist. Her reply to this; “I really hadn’t thought about it that much.” Hadn’t thought about it!? This is **the** most important thing in her life, she attended church no fewer than four times per week, and she hadn’t thought about it?! I didn’t want to force the issue on unwilling ears so I left it by recommending she check it out and get back to me if she wanted. She never, ever brought up religion in my presence again.

There are two sides to atheism. On the one hand it is *for* making your life (of which we may only get one and a much shorter one than Christians believe) the most meaningful, and most productive life you can.[[2]](#footnote-3) And atheism is *against,* not religion, but wasted lives; not Gods, but humans being mere shadows of what they could and should be.

**Part One – The Bible and God**

**The Bible**

What I, and all Christians, consider to be the most important thing in Christianity is the Bible. The entire religion is based around this single book. Surely, it must be a good read then, right? That is exactly what I first thought before I actually read it. It took me about twenty eight years to get around to reading it and when I finally did my attitude was one of curiosity. I wasn’t a Christian and definitely didn’t believe in the Christian God but I was still undecided on Jesus and I did have a faith in some kind of Presence. I knew I wasn’t going to become a Christian overnight, transformed by the Bible’s words of wisdom, but I thought to myself, if so many people swear on it, it’s got to be interesting. Well, interesting it was. Useful? Not so much. Before I finished reading the very first chapter (Genesis) I had already discarded the Bible as a completely unreliable text and it is my opinion that any sensible human being would come to the exact same conclusion.

What is the Bible?

First of all, let’s look at exactly what the Bible is. Is it a cohesive, well written manuscript befitting God, Creator of the universe and everything in it? It would be amazing if this were so, that *would* be a great read, but sadly, it is not. It is a piecemeal, fragmented, contradictory account of history taken from the perspective of a single, insecure culture.

The sad reality (sad for Christians, anyway) is that no one actually knows exactly how, when or where the chapters in the Bible came to be. Given the nature of the Bible, we do know that it was not written as a book. Each chapter (‘book’ to use the correct term) was written by a different author, in a different place and at a different time. There are some exceptions, for example, we know that several of Paul’s (formerly Saul’s) letters are represented in the New Testament in different chapters, nevertheless the fact is that the Bible as a whole represents nothing more than a collection of stories composed by many different authors at different times and places. It’s funny but Christians just don’t seem to think that this is a strange way to make a spiritual text that millions of people will use as a guide for their lives. It is essentially like gathering a bunch of diaries written by people we don’t know, talking about events we can’t be certain they actually witnessed (although I *am* certain that the author of Genesis wasn’t around watching the Earth and the animals come into being) and throwing them together to make a story. Imagine if you were to gather a bunch of diary entries written by people today about certain people and/or certain events and try to build a historically accurate spiritual and philosophical tome from them. You could do it, but I would have serious doubts about its accuracy, and if I were God, I would probably just wave my finger and create it in... maybe six seconds (of course, I’d take a rest on the seventh).

Christians make up a number of different excuses to avoid accepting this truth. God managed the whole process; He dictated it to the authors through prophecy, the apostles were given ‘authority’ by Jesus, etc. But any sensible, clear-thinking person must realise the truth of the situation. There is not one single scrap of evidence to even remotely suggest that a God (even *if* He exists) had absolutely anything to do with the Bible’s creation. These chapters were written by Divine Inspiration, Jesus gave these people Divine authority to write about this and that, this person was ‘born again,’ that person had a Divine Revelation, etc, and so all of these people’s words are beyond reproach. When I hear Christians try to tell me that, I’m offended because they are insulting my intelligence. I mean really, they’re not even attempting to justify their claim that the Bible is completely true; they’re just saying, “Oh, either God or His son gave authority to the authors, so it must be true.” On what planet does that constitute a good reason for believing the messages in a book?

The books in the Bible were written by humans. Come on people. Is that such an outlandish claim? I’m not endorsing any magical, superstitious feat here; I’m suggesting humans wrote a book. How can that idea be dismissed out of hand? Yet, if you say that to a Christian they will scoff as if you just told them that you saw a unicorn the other day and then they’ll proceed to tell you that the Being who created the universe wrote it, and what’s more they’ll do it with full conviction, as if they watched it happen right in front of them!

Here’s something to think about. Why is it so important that the Bible be the ‘word of God’? Because Christians *need* it to be. If it isn’t, they’ve got nothing. Their God has deserted them, God’s son has deserted them (I’m assuming he could have saved his life and lived for a hell of a lot (excuse the phrase) longer if he’d really wanted to) and the last word on Christianity came about two thousand years ago. The Church founders even emphasised the fact that God stopped talking to people at that time because if they didn’t close that door, then people would be free to communicate with God whenever they wished and get their inspiration direct from Him rather than through the Church. For an institution so obsessed with control, that was unacceptable.

If that little black book turned out to be fallible, Christianity would be left high and dry and without a leg to stand on. So, they will defend that book tooth and nail, and they will never capitulate on it being the word of God because He hasn’t given them anything else. In the face of the clearest contradictions and the gravest errors, they will go on believing. Why? What could make someone fly in the face of commonsense so? There is no other choice for them. The Bible is all they have.

Let’s quickly summarise the situation thus far; we have a bunch of different accounts from a bunch of different authors, some of whom are anonymous and some of whom were important people central to the story; so who gathered these differing accounts together? Considering the value Christians place on the Bible, you would be justified in thinking God did, but you would also be completely wrong. So who was it? Again, there is no easy answer to this question. It seems that a bunch of different people had a hand in compiling ‘the’ Bible at different times in history. Jesus was clearly aware of many of the prophecies from the Old Testament (although presumably at that time it was just called ‘The Testament’) and from what I can gather people tend to believe that it was compiled by Jewish Priests in the first couple of hundred years BC.

The New Testament is a different matter. Opinions vary considerably on when the New Testament books were canonised but it seems quite clear that high members of the Roman Catholic Church were debating this point for a number of years (even centuries) before they decided on a list of books to be included. Did these canonised books proclaim themselves as such to the early Church Fathers? Again, given the fuss that Christians make over them you would think so, but you would be wrong.

Obviously one of the main requirements was that the chosen books be the Divinely inspired, word of God. So, how did the Church leaders identify them as such? They discussed and deliberated (and probably argued a fair bit - as humans tend to do) and the result was the New Testament.

The key point I want to stress here is that on both accounts we know that it was men who decided which writings would be included in the Bible. Mere men. Men who are sinful and corrupt *by nature*, according to Christianity’s own dogma. Sure, many of these priests/monks/Rabbis were probably faithful, sincere people trying to create a text that showed God in the correct light and delivered His message to the people in the best way… but they were just people. In the best case scenario, they did the best job they could but at the end of the day they were just like you or me, subject to the same doubts, fears and mistakes that all of us are plagued with. Why would they reject some documents? Because those documents don’t align with their spiritual views on what God intended for us. Now, as impartial as they may have been, there is a significant conflict of interest for these folks, isn’t there? Their jobs were on the line, not to mention their faith. Just think about it. By this time, Christianity had already become political and the decisions these Church fathers made would have profound effects on the present and future evolution of the Church. Where was God while all of this was going on? Oh, that’s right; He bailed a long time ago. So, who was left to take care of it all? Why, humans with very human goals and very human weaknesses.

How did they decide? What do you think? Did they ask God? Jesus? I bet they put it to a vote, or perhaps the head priest just stepped in and said, “Enough bickering. Here’s the list.” Curse me as an ignorant, uneducated blasphemer if you will, but the truth is I can’t be sure and neither can anyone else. That’s why there’s still debate about it going on to this very day. However, while I can’t be sure, I can definitely be sensible. Instead of clinging to a, let’s be honest, a long-shot idea like the Bible is somehow sacred and represents the infallible word of God, I’m being reasonable and accepting the reality of the situation. Humans wrote the Bible and humans compiled it using very human means, i.e. *not* by conversing with God.

Just to put things in perspective, imagine you were placed in charge of creating a new Bible and were to head a team of Christians in collating various articles and statements to go into this new Bible. Even if the assembled group was composed of just Christians, how much arguing do you think would go on? Different Christians everywhere, even within the same Church, have differing beliefs and opinions in various areas of their faith despite the fact that they may all be equally pious and passionate about religion. With all of these differing viewpoints emphasising different things, who’s right? How do we know that the ‘right’ message, ‘God’s’ message, will make it into our new Bible? How do we know that ‘God’s’ message made it into the Old and New Testaments?

“But wait!” Christians still say. Those church leaders weren’t just humans. They were the voice of God, chosen because they were somehow more than human. “They weren’t like you or me,” they argue. “It was different back then.” Right. Just like all of those priests who have been accused (and found guilty) of molesting young boys. Wake up. If anything was different two thousand years ago it was that things were even less secure and much more volatile. Think about it sensibly, (that’s all I will ever ask of you by the way) would you trust your faith or spirituality to a person (or group of people) who predates the dark ages, still thinks the Earth is the centre of the Universe, was directly responsible for the brutality witnessed in the Crusades, initiated the dreaded Inquisition, burned men and women at the stake and believed that women should, “keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but *they are* to be submissive” (that’s a direct quote from the Bible by the way, 1 Cor 14:34)? Why do modern people venerate these ancient people who were clearly less educated and much less knowledgeable than we are now? Isn’t it funny how we scoff at the beliefs and opinions of our grandparents as ‘old-fashioned,’ maybe a mere eighty years earlier, but venerate the opinions of people who lived two or three thousand years ago?

Consider this; the greatest thinkers throughout history have always been at least partially handicapped by the beliefs of their times, the societal and political structures of the day and the science/technology available to them. Even Newton (arguably the greatest thinker to have ever graced the planet), first, didn’t get everything right (Einstein improved on his theory of gravity) and second, although he was exceptionally original, even he didn’t make it all up on the spot, but rather built on the ideas that other great thinkers before him had constructed.

These days, many people are extremely well-educated (especially compared to at any other time in the past) and the incredible pace of technology is continually revolutionising the world. Certainly in terms of intelligence and understanding, we are perched at the pinnacle of human evolution thus far, I’m not saying this is not destructive, but I am saying that we, as a race (the human race) are at the peak of our achievements.

As a result of this progression our modern thinkers (by this, I mean you and me) are, in general, light years ahead of anybody who was around two thousand years ago, just by virtue of the fact that we can stand on the shoulders of all those who have come before us and benefit from all their effort. That goes without saying, doesn’t it? We are smarter, and not just ‘book smarter’ but ‘life smarter’ than our ancestors and have progressed a lot further in our thoughts. In turn, our descendents will be smarter still and I pray, not still clinging to the beliefs and customs that continue to plague us in our current era.

As a little side note on the Bible compilation issue these are two of the theories I have heard from Christians. The Pope “prompted by the Holy Spirit” issued a decree officially determining the canonical books. Of course, they have to get that God-given authority in there somehow. Why bother attempting to justify it? Let’s just *say* God inspired him. Millions of Christians around the world breathed a sigh of relief at that. “Aaah. He was prompted by the Holy Spirit, I was wondering about that. Case closed...”

The other one tells of a Russian immigrant who studied the Bible and “demonstrated conclusively that they had to be of supernatural origin.” Ah, of course! There it is, proven by this Russian immigrant that no human being could possibly have conceived the words in the Bible. If you believe that story, I fear that even this book can’t help you. I worry that if someone tells you they found a potato in the shape of Jesus’ head, you will turn up on their doorstep and ask to worship the potato.

Okay, sorry. Let’s get back on track. Already before this hallowed book has made it into our hands it has been written by a number of different people, collected by a number of other different people and then argued about for a number of years by a number of still more different people. Not a very good start for a book trying to get itself established as the word of God.

But it doesn’t end there. What language were these texts written in? Well, the Old Testament was written in Hebrew and the New Testament predominantly in Greek. So, they also had to translate it. How many people speak Hebrew or Greek these days? Now, it may be a little harsh of me, and I certainly don’t maintain that if people’s first language isn’t English they can’t read a translation of an English text and receive almost the same benefit, but for such an important work, couldn’t God have provided us with a few different copies in a few different languages? I mean, just to make sure that His word was accurately represented to all people, especially since He separated us in the first place, according to the Tower of Babel story. No, no. “It was God’s will.” Let me just clarify if you still don’t know yet, that answer is completely unacceptable in the context of a thinking person’s discussion.

So, let’s just recap what we have here. The Bible is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. It’s what millions of Christians around the world rely on, turn to in their hour(s) of need and base their whole lives around. If I could believe that it was the work of God, I would do the same. But, you don’t need a PhD in Biblical Studies to know that the Bible probably didn’t come from God. Come on people, sensible thinking. It’s not a big stretch to imagine that people wrote and compiled the Bible. If you want to bury your head in the sand and hold to your beliefs for no other reason than you’re afraid of losing them, that’s fine, but if that is the case, I’m not sure why you’re reading this book. It will not help you in the slightest. It is only usable by clear-thinking, sensible creatures.

Anyway, it is my somewhat controversial opinion that the Bible is not a Divine text (how amazing and scary that it could be controversial to claim a book was written by humans!) written or inspired by God. Nevertheless, it gathered for itself a huge following so I decided to read it. Now, unlike most people who read the Bible I did it from a clear-headed, sensible perspective and here is what I found:

Questions Raised From the Bible

Before I get into the thick of this section I want to answer a criticism that is bound to come up at some point. Some people will claim that it is unfair to take bits and pieces of the Bible (or any other text) out of context and attack it. That is true and normally I would wholly endorse that sentiment, however, in this case I disagree with it for two reasons.

First, the Bible is supposed to be written by God. If it isn’t, then there is nothing special about it. It’s just another book written by humans reflecting their very human notions about life, death and spirituality (circa 2,000 years ago, of course). I can go to the bookshop and get a hundred others like it tomorrow. The whole thing that supposedly sets the Bible apart from other texts is its Divine origin. Of course, with that in mind, it should, nay, *must* be completely error-free. There should be no contradictions, no errors, no incorrect messages. If there are, then how do we know what is truth and what is error (and what separates it from any other spiritual text out there)?

Second, it’s impossible to take out of context quotes like, “For I, the LORD your God, *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth *generations* of those who hate Me.” (Ex 20) or “I will destroy your high places, cut down your incense altars, and cast your carcasses on the lifeless forms of your idols; and My soul shall abhor you.” (Lev 26) They seem abundantly clear (and a little graphic) to me. In what context would it be acceptable for God’s soul to abhor me? How could that threat / promise be ameliorated by putting it in context?

If you still feel that I’ve taken something out of context, please refer to the appropriate section of the Bible and verify for yourself. I have tried to be as objective as I can in my analysis, but I will leave that for you to judge…

Anyway, now that that’s out of the way, the following are things that seem to slip under the radar for most people but when I encountered them in the Bible I was completely stunned. Most of the following section is comprised of quotes taken from the Bible that seem to be at odds with things I have been led to believe are true of God and His actions or that I think should be true of God and goodness in general. Considering the alleged “Divine” source of the material, one would imagine such a book to be flawlessly perfect. Unfortunately for Christians, the Bible is far from that. By the way, all of my quotes are taken from the New King James version.

The Creation Stor*ies*:

There are two different stories of human creation in the Bible. Genesis 1 talks about everything being made in six days. The Heavens, the Earth and light on day one, a ‘firmament’ to divide Heaven and Earth on the second day, land and plants on the third day, the stars on the fourth day, sea creatures and birds on the fifth day, and animals (this included all “beasts of the land” first, and then man and woman (at the same time)) on the sixth day. No problems, right? But in Genesis 2 it claims that God rested on the seventh day and *then* decided that it was time to create man, Gen 2:5 “…*there was* no man to till the ground.” Also in Gen 2, God creates man (still no woman) before he creates the animals and brings them to Adam to name but in Gen 1 animals are clearly created before man and woman (the sea creatures and birds are created a whole day before them).

This double creation story doesn’t jump off the page and grab you with its inconsistency, it’s kind of subtle in a cursory read and I can see how many people would have glossed over it but still, when was man created; the sixth day or sometime after the seventh day? Before animals of after them? Was man created first and woman from his rib or were they created together? These are big contradictions for any text let alone a religious one purported to be the word of God.

Another thing that sounds suspicious in the creation stories is how everything in the universe sounds like it is made specifically for humans. People couldn’t possibly be expected to know two this thousand years ago, but we now know that Earth is decidedly *not* special. It is not in a special place in the Universe or even in our galaxy. We are just a normal planet in a very average place (not even close to the centre) of the Milky Way (luckily for us because there’s a supermassive black hole sitting there!), which is itself just one of many galaxies also not in the centre of anything. Genesis 1 talks about the stars being made so that there could be a distinction between night and day and just to give light to Earth, Gen 1:15 “…and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth.” Wow! Lucky us. God made the stars and the sun so that we could see. It seems to me (just as an insignificant human on an insignificant planet) that that is not how an omnipotent being like God in the process of creating the universe would think, it sounds like the thought of an insecure human trying to guarantee his (or her) ‘specialness’ in a universe which could care less either way.

Adam’s Time:

* Gen 2:17 “for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

This is God commanding Adam (Eve hadn’t been made yet, at least according to the second version) not to eat from the tree of knowledge. Funnily enough, they did eat from the tree but they didn’t die. Was it an idle threat from God? How could something that God decreed not come to pass?

* Genesis 3: Why did God put the dreaded tree of knowledge in front of Adam if he was forbidden to eat from it?

Let me ask you a simple question. Would you, as a parent, give your children matches, tell them not to play with them and then leave them alone? Would you expect that parent to be nominated for parent of the year? Of course not; and yet that’s exactly what the “Ultimate Parent,” God, does. If even a human parent wouldn’t do it, surely God as the ‘best parent’ wouldn’t either.

* Genesis 3: Why did God even bother creating a “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” if no one was allowed to eat from it?

There are those who say God offered humankind the choice to follow his way or to follow the path of sin. This seems like a strong argument until you consider it in a different light, perhaps one closer to home. Would you give your children a tablet of the drug ecstasy but warn them of its dangers under the pretence of offering them a “choice” to be good or bad? The answer is obvious, is it not?

But if that analogy seems too harsh for you let’s go back a step and be less dramatic. Do you let your children do whatever they want? Do you give them complete free reign or do you closely guide them so that they become well-adjusted, happy individuals (according to what you think a happy, well-adjusted individual should be)? Any parent who raised their children with the attitude of God, who lets His children sin because he is giving them ‘freewill,’ would be committed to a psychiatric institution.

Some might claim that Adam and Eve weren’t children and deserved to be treated with the respect one would give to adults, i.e. in allowing them to make an informed decision. That’s all well and good, but everything was going fine in the Garden of Eden, why did God have to go and throw a spanner in the works with a tree, the only consequence of which could be bad? Consider, if there were no such thing as cigarettes, would you invent them just so that your children (even adult ones) could choose to say no? What if they said yes? Sounds like another candidate for parent of the year…

* Genesis 3: Does the ‘tree of the knowledge of good and evil’ actually sound that bad?

I mean, it’s not the “tree of evil” or the “tree of darkness” or anything. It’s knowledge for God’s sakes! (Excuse the pun) Is knowledge a sin now? Why did God call it the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, if it’s such a bad thing? If I was given the choice of eating all the fruit in the Garden of Eden except those from the “tree of Satan”, you can be damn sure I wouldn’t touch them! But the tree of knowledge...? Doesn’t sound so bad...

* Genesis 3: How did the snake get into the Garden of Eden?

We’re led to believe that God knows all and is omnipotent so how could the cunning snake slip one over on God? Oh, “God knew everything that was happening” the Christians tell us, “Of course, He allowed it to happen – He’s God,” they claim. “Perhaps we simple humans can’t understand the mind of God,” they say. But Genesis clearly states that God did not know any of this had happened. Gen 3:8 “Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, “Where *are* you?”” Do those sound like the words of a God who knows everything? And, how did Adam hide from God? *Can* you hide from God? Gen 3:11 “And He said, “Who told you that you *were* naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?”” Shouldn’t God already know this?

* Gen 3:14 “So the LORD God said to the serpent:   
        “Because you have done this,   
        You *are* cursed more than all cattle,   
        And more than every beast of the field;   
        On your belly you shall go…”

Now, is it just me or does this sound *exactly* like one of those myths every culture has that explains something observed in nature? Check out this myth from New Zealand:

The sun used to race across the sky as fast as it could and there was not enough time in the day to do what needed to be done. So one day a brave warrior called Maui made a lasso and climbed the tallest peak in the land. From there he waited and when the sun came streaking past he lassoed it and held it tightly. The sun tried to escape but Maui was too strong. Finally, he consented to let the sun go only if it promised to cross the sky more slowly so that the people would have time to complete their chores… and that is why the sun travels across the sky so slowly.

Or from Korea:

A long time ago all of the animals used to live in harmony until one day they began arguing about who should be the senior in the group. Finally, they asked God to decide and He arranged a race. The winner would be crowned the most senior. So they raced, and the cunning rat, by riding on the horns of the cow, won. The cat, which had been sleeping, woke up after the race was over and asked the rat why he didn’t wake him. The rat apologised, and hiding behind the cow said he forgot. The cat was still angry about this and… to this day if a rat sees a cat, it will flee in fear.

Myths like these served a purpose for primitive cultures the world over; they helped the people orient themselves regarding their position in nature and explain things which had previously been inexplicable. In short, they helped these cultures order and structure their existence. The important point to note is that the format of these myths is identical to that of this story in the Bible. All answer a question about something that occurs in nature. Why does the sun move so slowly across the sky? Why are rats afraid of cats? Why do snakes slither along on the ground? The only difference is that Korea and New Zealand didn’t have press agents as strong as those who promoted the Bible.

* Why did God have to punish Eve so severely?

After the couple ate from the tree this is a part of Eve’s sentence: Gen 3:19 “In pain you shall bring forth children;” Now, knowing how terribly painful childbirth is, (or at least how terribly painful it looks!) that’s a pretty harsh sentence. Is that our loving, benevolent, *forgiving* God? Common sense people, common sense. Just be sensible, if your children disobeyed you would you make giving birth (the ultimate expression of love and life) the incredibly painful experience it currently is for them? Only you wouldn’t stop there, you would force *every* future generation from your children on, to be victim to that same punishment. If you, as a puny human, wouldn’t inflict such pain on your children, how could God, who is supposed to be infinitely more (more generous, more understanding, more forgiving, more loving) than a human, do so?

Of great interest also, note the myth format. Question: why is giving birth so painful? Answer: because Eve ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

* Why were Adam and Eve sent out from the Garden of Eden?

Because they disobeyed God and ate from the tree, right? Wrong. Gen 3:22 “Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”— 23 therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken.” The “Us” section we’ll deal with later, for now treat ‘Us’ as meaning ‘God’ and let’s focus on why our ancestors were booted from the Garden.

Adam ate from the tree of knowledge and he learnt good and evil, and now in case he should also eat from the tree of life and live forever, God needs to kick him out. Here’s the thing you’ve never been taught in Sunday School. It’s clearly not a part of the punishment; it’s to prevent Adam from becoming too powerful. He has already learnt things God didn’t want him to (“and become like Us (God)”) and now he may also live forever. God is limiting Adam, keeping him down, maintaining a gap between humans and Himself. The word, ‘therefore’ in the quote seals the interpretation. He clearly states Adam is becoming like Us (God). He was not exiled as a punishment, but to keep Adam and humanity less than the Gods. There’s no other way to read this section.

Interestingly enough this again fits in with our myth thesis. Question: Why do we die? Answer: Because God prevented us eating from the tree of life (fountain of youth?).

As a side note, isn’t it interesting that (they/)God isn’t worried at all about Eve. She doesn’t even warrant a mention in the discussion, “the **man** has become like...” “God sent **him** out...” “drove out the **man**...” (my boldface).

As a double side note, weren’t Adam and Eve already supposed to be living forever? But according to the Bible… “And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever…” So God was worried about Adam eating from the tree of life because then he would live forever. That means he *wasn’t* already living forever. As if I needed proof of that but Christians seem to believe the opposite.

* Gen 3:24 “So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.”

This merely reinforces the point I made above. After driving Adam and Eve from the Garden, He has to set up a guard to protect the precious tree of life because it is this, the tree of life; that is the main thing God is worried about. He didn’t kick them out of the Garden because they were bad; he kicked them out so that they couldn’t live forever.

Also, if you think about this passage a little more you will find yourself asking one more question. Is this the action of an omnipotent God? Why does He need to set cherubim to guard anything? If He doesn’t want something to happen, shouldn’t it just not happen?

Other Gods:

There are multiple references to other Gods in the Bible, some are subtle but some completely overt. The notion of something or someone being equal to God really takes the wind out of the sails of the whole ‘One God’ line, doesn’t it? Let’s kick this off with God Himself:

* Ex 20:3 “You shall have no other gods before Me.” The infamous first commandment. Now, some Christians will have you believe that He is referring not to actual gods but to things like money, power, etc. This is a clever move and would work if it weren’t for the other plentiful quotes scattered throughout the Bible that clearly and unequivocally refer to other gods as definite beings, often identifying them by name. The sheer weight and number of these other references make it clear that other ‘gods’ were in competition with ‘*the* God.’ Sounds a lot like the Greek Gods, who were always fighting amongst each other and competing for various people and things, doesn’t it?
* Let’s quickly revisit the creation stories, check out the wording used in Gen 1 when God creates man. Gen 1:26 “Then God said, “Let **Us** make man in **Our** image, according to **Our** likeness…” (The highlights are mine) Does anyone else not think it strange that ‘God’ is plural? I don’t remember ever being taught that in Sunday School. It sounds very much like a team of beings doing something, maybe from an ancient myth of a long lost culture. At the very least, it doesn’t sound like a single omnipotent God creating the universe. Could these others be angels? I don’t think so. God said, “in Our image, according to Our likeness…” Now, from everything I’ve ever read or heard, God is definitely greater than an angel, but this passage smacks of equality.

* Gen 3:22 “Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us…” A typo? Sounds like the Greek Gods doesn’t it, Zeus, Apollo and the crew… Does anyone still believe in them? Additionally, man has become like a God! Who is this God who man can become similar to? If we are talking about the creator of the universe I would think it impossible for a mere man to even come close to that kind of ability… wouldn’t you?
* Gen 11:7 “Come, let Us go down there and confuse their language.” This is God talking at the Tower of Babel incident, again clearly speaking in the plural.
* Ex 15:11 “Who *is* like You, O LORD, among the gods?” This is from Moses’ song. Who are these other gods? He’s definitely not talking about money or power here.
* Ex 18:11 “Now I know that the LORD is greater than all the gods; for in the very thing in which they behaved proudly, *He was* above them.” This is Jethro, Moses’ father in law talking to Moses. It seems that it is common knowledge that God is first a male and second just one of a group of Gods.
* Ex 22:20 “He who sacrifices to any god, except to the LORD only, he shall be utterly destroyed.” This is God Himself talking and as such is fairly strong evidence that other “gods” existed. No one would make a sacrifice to money or power. It also reveals God’s jealous and insecure nature that he would mandate such a harsh punishment for this transgression.
* Just in case you are still unconvinced, here is a list of actual names of other Gods mentioned in the Bible: Ashtoreth – Goddess of the Sidonians; Milcom – God of the Ammonites; Chemosh – God of the Moab; Molech – God of the Ammon; Baal-Zebub – the God of Ekron; Succoth Benoth – the God of Babylon; Nergal – the God of the Cuth; Ashima – the God of the Hamath; Nibhaz and Tartak – the Gods of the Avites; Adrammelech and Anammalech – the Gods of the Sepharvites; Dagon – the God of the Philistines.

Sexism:

The Bible is replete with examples of sexism and constantly talks about man as the master and women as mere chattels or property. Women are degraded right from the creation story and it never stops.

* In Gen 2:18 God says the following; “*It is* not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.” Guess who that helper was? That’s right, woman. She doesn’t even get a decent breath of God to kick-start her life like man does, He just takes a rib from man and fashions her from that. How insulting!

Women are seldom granted any right to being as an independent entity; they are often lumped in with men as if they are his property. Take some of the following as examples:

* Gen 2:25 “And they were both naked, the man and his wife…”
* Gen 3:16 “Your desire *shall be* for your husband, And he shall rule over you.” This is God Himself talking. He is sentencing Eve for eating from the tree of knowledge. How many Christian women agree with this? Your man shall rule over you! If someone said that these days he would hardly be praised as God. He would be condemned as a chauvinist.
* Gen 3:20 “Adam called his wife’s name Eve…” She doesn’t even get to choose her own name.
* Gen 29:27 “Fulfil her week, and we will give you this one also for the service which you will serve with me still another seven years.” This is Laban talking about his daughters. Esau has requested one of Laban’s daughters for his wife and Laban is going to give him both of them. Women are given away like chattels. *And* Esau is marrying two women. Funny, the Bible never mentions a woman marrying two men… So much for the sanctity of marriage.
* Gen 22:24 “His concubine, whose name was Reumah…” The ‘his’ in this passage is Abraham’s brother, Nahor. It seems concubines are permissible in Christianity. Let the feminists see that!
* Ex 21:10 “If he takes another *wife*…” Yup, that’s God talking, just in case anyone was unclear as to whether God condones polygamy, at least for males.
* Lev 15:19 “If a woman has a discharge, *and* the discharge from her body is blood, she shall be set apart seven days; and whoever touches her shall be unclean until evening.” Now, I agree that there is a certain level of hygiene that should be maintained in this case but come on. Isn’t this a bit extreme? She must be allowed no human touch for the duration of her period? Is that really a Divine decree?
* Lev 19:20 “Whoever lies carnally with a woman who is betrothed to a man as a concubine…” God condones concubines again by His own voice.
* Num 5:29 “This *is* the law of jealousy, when a wife, while under her husband’s authority…” Just in case you were still unsure of God’s position concerning the hierarchy in the home.

And just in case you thought sexism only existed in the Old Testament:

* Jesus himself never actually goes into the gender issue but note that none of his disciples are women. That speaks volumes.
* 1 Cor 11:7 “For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. 8 For man is not from woman, but woman from man. 9 Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man. 10 For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.” Wow! Thanks Paul. This is Paul instructing the Church of God at Corinth.
* 1 Cor 14:35 “it is shameful for women to speak in church” More words of wisdom from Paul.
* Eph 5:22 “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is head of the wife.” This is Paul again, this time talking to the Saints in Ephesus.

Sex / Incest (Nope, that’s not a mistake):

* Gen 19:32 “Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve the lineage of our father.” No this is not a scene from Melrose Place (even they wouldn’t go this far!). It’s Lot’s daughters talking about having sex with their father.
* Gen 26:34 “When Esau was forty years old, he took as wives Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite.”
* In Gen 29 Esau takes his two aunts as wives and then in Gen 30 he sleeps with both of his wives maids so that they can bear him children. Go Esau! What happened to the 7th commandment? Don’t commit adultery…
* Lev 15:16 “‘If any man has an emission of semen, then he shall wash all his body in water, and be unclean until evening.” No wonder so many Christians feel that sex is sinful. I must confess my sins; I have emitted semen and not pronounced myself unclean until the evening. Am I alone in this sin?

Animal Sacrifices:

* Gen 8:20 “Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.”
* Gen 8:21 “And the LORD smelled a soothing aroma.” Does God like the killing and burning of animals?

Now, if God demanded these offerings from his chosen people several thousand years ago, why did He suddenly stop requiring them? Does God change His mind? How come we don’t do it these days? God didn’t tell anyone we don’t need to sacrifice anymore so aren’t we all sinning by not obeying these rituals? He definitely laid down the law concerning offerings and he never remitted it, so all good Christians who want to go to Heaven had better start sacrificing, pronto! I feel that any religious mandate delivered directly from God Himself shouldn’t change; He is supposed to be above mortal things such as change and impermanence. Shouldn’t something once holy, be holy forever?

Anyone who says animal sacrifices weren’t important to God needs to read Exodus 29. The entire section is solely devoted to the precise manner in which sacrifices must be made. And it is not just anybody talking about it, it’s supposedly God Himself. The exact same thing happens in the first seven chapters of Leviticus. All God talks about is all of the various offerings that must be made for different reasons and exactly how they are to be performed. He goes into extreme detail for these rituals and I repeat; he never remits them. If you purport to be following the Bible, you should be sacrificing.

Some people may claim that animal sacrifices were no longer necessary, as ordained by Paul, when he had his ‘transformation’ (although this is never addressed in the Bible). I find this to be inadequate. God was extremely explicit about it in the Old Testament and it seems contrary to me that God, *the* God, should change His mind about something He obviously deemed so very important.

Alcohol:

* Gen 9:21 “Then he drank of the wine and was drunk…” This is the great Noah getting liquored in his tent. Maybe we’re not allowed to masturbate but at least we can drink.

Slavery:

* Gen 17:12 “he who is born in your house or **bought with money** from any foreigner who is not your descendant...” (My highlights) God condones slavery?
* Ex 21:2 “If you buy a Hebrew servant…” This is God making clear His views on slavery.
* Ex 21:20 “And if a man beats his male or female servant with a rod, so that he dies under his hand, he shall surely be punished. 21 Notwithstanding, if he remains alive a day or two, he shall not be punished; for he *is* his property.” Hmmm, interesting rules here. It seems modern society has got it all wrong in outlawing slavery.
* Lev 25:44 “And as for your male and female slaves whom you may have—from the nations that are around you, from them you may buy male and female slaves. 45 Moreover you may buy the children of the strangers who dwell among you, and their families who are with you, which they beget in your land; and they shall become your property. 46 And you may take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit *them as* a possession; they shall be your permanent slaves.” This is God directly talking again. This is not second hand information. Gotta have those slaves, huh? I mean, who else is going to take out the trash?

God’s Chosen People:

* Gen 9:25 “Cursed *be* Canaan; a servant of servants he shall be to his brethren.” This is Noah talking about one of his sons, Ham. What could Ham have possibly done to deserve such a punishment? Did he get a girl pregnant? Kill someone? Crash his Dad’s car? No. He saw his father drunk and naked in the tent and told his brothers about it. What an animal!! Time for one of those Divine punishments that affects every future generation...
* Gen 19:8 “See now, I have two daughters who have not known a man; please, let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you wish; only do nothing to these men…” This is Lot speaking to the townsfolk of Sodom. Two angels have gone into town on God’s behalf and are staying at Lot’s place to ascertain if there are any good people in the town. The townsfolk are trying to beat down Lot’s door so that they can “know them (the angels) *carnally*” - interpret that anyway you like. Instead Lot offers up his daughters in their place. Good one, Dad!
* In Gen 22, God tells Abraham to take his son up a mountain and kill him. And Abraham was prepared to do it! Another candidate for father of the year! In the end we find out it was just a test. Just let me ask you this question. If I requested that my son demonstrate his faith to me by killing his sister (even if I stopped him before he committed the terrible act), would you praise me as a good parent? Would you praise my son as a good man for being prepared to follow through with it? If it sounds ridiculous even for humans with our lowly, sinful natures then it should be infinitely ridiculous for God.

* Ex 2:12 “…he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.” Now, wasn’t it God who said, “Thou shalt not murder”? Guess who this section is talking about… none other than the great Moses. It is true that the Egyptian was beating a Hebrew, but still, is this how Christians resolve problems?

God’s Punishments:

* Gen 20:7 “But if you do not restore *her,* know that you shall surely die, you and all who *are* yours.” This is God talking to King Abimelech after he took Sarah (Abraham’s wife) to be his own. There are two things to note here. One, the King is not so bad. Abraham and even Sarah herself claimed that she was just his sister, not his wife, so Abimelech couldn’t possibly have known different. Second, isn’t this a harsh punishment from a loving God, for any crime? He won’t kill just the King but all of his family as well. This sounds more like a mafia gangster.
* Ex 19:12 “Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death.” This is God talking to Moses. Does anyone else think that’s a harsh punishment for setting foot on a mountain?
* Ex 19:21 “And the LORD said to Moses, “Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to gaze at the LORD, and many of them perish.” Again, quite a harsh punishment. It reminds me of the Kings of our own past who forbade their subjects from even looking at them. Interesting, huh.
* Ex 20:5 “For I, the LORD your God, *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth *generations* of those who hate Me.” Can God be jealous? That doesn’t sound like the Creator of the Universe to me. How could you make such a Being jealous? He has everything! Again, note the severity of the punishment, He will not just punish you, but your children’s, children’s, children’s children. Whew! That’s Divine love for you.
* Ex 21:12 “He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death.”

And:

* Ex 21:24 “eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, 25 burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.” Is this divine? Jesus proclaims that you love your enemy, not exact a revenge that fits the crime. Are Jesus and God on the same team?
* Lev 24:19 “‘If a man causes disfigurement of his neighbour, as he has done, so shall it be done to him— 20 fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; as he has caused disfigurement of a man, so shall it be done to him.”
* Ex 22:24 “…and My wrath will become hot, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.” Is that a line from the latest Schwarzenegger movie? No, it’s God talking about the consequences if you “afflict” a widow or fatherless child.
* Ex 31:14 “You shall keep the Sabbath, therefore, for *it is* holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death.”
* Ex 31:15 “Whoever does *any* work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death.” Whoa! Anybody doing any work on Sundays? Be careful, God’s watching.
* Ex 32:27 “Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘Let every man put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.’” Ex 32:28 “So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people fell that day.” This was Moses talking about killing 3000 of his own people because they began worshipping a golden calf statue that Aaron had made.
* Ex 33:3 “for I will not go up in your midst, lest I consume you on the way, for you *are* a stiff-necked people.” This is how much God ‘loves’ His people.
* Lev 10:1 “Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them.” Lev 10:2 “So fire went out from the LORD and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.” So, now God is killing people who are devoted to him and offer him incense because it appears they didn’t follow the ritual precisely enough to please Him.
* In Leviticus 26 God spends 14 verses telling ‘his people’ how great it will be if they follow his rules; lovely right? But then he spends the huge majority (25 verses) of this chapter telling them the terror, agony and destruction he will bring upon them if they break his rules. This is a beautiful example of fear-based manipulation. Something all Christians have inherited, and try to generously impart to everyone else to this day. It is Divine to issue ultimatums.
* Num 15:36 “So, as the LORD commanded Moses, all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him with stones, and he died.” This is the penalty for working on the Sabbath. He was gathering firewood. Enough said.
* Finally after all of the work Moses has done leading the Jews through the desert and being God’s ever-faithful right-hand man, God sentences him to death before they enter the Promised Land. At the end of Deuteronomy 32 and in Deut 34 God lets Moses look on the land before him but refuses him entry because of some kind of minor transgression in Numbers 20. When you read that section (called Moses’ Error) you will be as confused as I was. God says Moses did not believe and hallow Him in front of the Jews but there is no reference to such an act at all. Bottom line, even a man as devout as Moses (and there are none more) was punished by God. I ask every Christian out there, “Are you as pious as Moses was?” If Moses was prevented from entering the Promised Land what do you think your punishment will be? Where will God prevent you from entering? Where will he send you instead?

Other Times When God Acts ‘Ungodly’:

* Gen 6:3 “And the LORD said, “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.” But Adam lived until 930 years of age, Methuselah lived until 969 and Moses lived until 950. Now, while these were probably at the top end, all of the guys around this time lived considerably longer than 120 years. Was God lying, was He wrong, was He tricking us? Should He be doing any of these?
* Gen 6:6 “And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.” God made a mistake?! Is that possible? Just how great is this God if He can experience regret and grief?
* Gen 17:10 “This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised...” This is one of the stupidest things I’ve ever heard of. The only thing I can compare it to is branding cattle so that no one else can steal them; why else would God need to mark His people in such a permanent and unnecessary way? Perhaps it’s a test of faith... Funny how God doesn’t know if we are faithful or not. Doesn’t he know everything? Isn’t it also curious that only men can be circumcised and therefore, ‘join the club?’ Although if you’ve read the earlier section you would know that to God, women are little more than an afterthought.
* Gen 17:14 “And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.” Any uncircumcised male Christians out there? I know that Paul remitted this rule later on, but as for the word of God directly; here it is.
* Gen 18:20 “And the LORD said, “Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, 21 I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know.” How come God doesn’t already know this? Why does he need a physical presence to determine anything?
* Gen 19:15 “When the morning dawned, the angels urged Lot to hurry, saying, “Arise, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be consumed in the punishment of the city.” Why would angels need to tell someone to hurry? Can’t they just spirit them away? What kind of angels are these that have to hurry to escape somewhere on foot?
* Gen 19:26 “But his wife looked back behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.” This is Lot’s wife as they were escaping from Sodom. Why on earth was God unable to prevent that from happening? She was a good person fleeing with her husband and the angels and yet she was killed by the strike on Sodom. Something’s not right with that.
* In Gen 22 God tells Abraham to take his son up a mountain and kill him. Why? To test his faith, of course! Why does an all-powerful, all-knowing God not know the mind of a single, puny human being? If He already knew Abraham’s faith, then why would He demand such a terrible act which, even if stopped before the grisly conclusion, could only serve to destroy the father-son relationship?

The only possible excuse for this behaviour is to say that God already knew Abraham’s faith but wanted Abraham to know the depth of it. Unfortunately, that’s just as bad. For someone to be so committed to someone (even to God) that you’re willing to kill for that person (Being), seems wrong to me no matter how you look at it.

* Ex 12:13 “Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you *are.* And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy *you* when I strike the land of Egypt.” This is God warning Moses of the Passover, when he will sweep through the land killing all the firstborn Egyptians. Nice guy, right? But seriously, why would God need a sign to know where “His people” are? Shouldn’t He already/always know?
* Ex 19:5 “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people.” I find it difficult to believe that *the* God, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient Creator of the universe would favour one tiny race of people over another. A God who would do this is more like a human (created in our image and likeness, maybe) than *the* Creator.
* Ex 34:14 “(for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name *is* Jealous, *is* a jealous God)” This is God directly talking to Moses. It’s funny but I never imagined jealousy as a Divine emotion.
* Ex 34:24 “For I will cast out the nations before you and enlarge your borders” This could be a quote from any ruler in known history. Hardly fitting for *the* God of the universe though.
* Lev 21:17 “Speak to Aaron, saying: ‘No man of your descendants in *succeeding* generations, who has *any* defect, may approach to offer the bread of his God. 18 For any man who has a defect shall not approach: a man blind or lame, who has a marred *face* or any *limb* too long, 19 a man who has a broken foot or broken hand, 20 or is a hunchback or a dwarf, or *a man* who has a defect in his eye, or eczema or scab, or is a eunuch. 21 No man of the descendants of Aaron the priest, who has a defect, shall come near to offer the offerings made by fire to the LORD. He has a defect; he shall not come near to offer the bread of his God. 22 He may eat the bread of his God, *both* the most holy and the holy; 23 only he shall not go near the veil or approach the altar, because he has a defect, lest he profane My sanctuaries; for I the LORD sanctify them.’” Straight from the mouth of the Lord, those with ‘defects’ are inferior to the rest of us. A truly Divine proclamation. What was Jesus doing hanging out with and helping lepers then?
* Num 13:2 “Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel” This is when God is leading the Israelites to war against various people, for what? Licentious behaviour? Disobeying God? No; land, of course. So God approves of war to increase one’s assets but why does He need spies? Why does He need an army for that matter? Shouldn’t He just be able to take and give what He wants?
* Num 16:35 “And a fire came out from the LORD and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering incense.” Thank you very much. This is God destroying His own people, the Israelites, as they were making offerings to him as well. A great guy to serve, is he not?
* Num 21:6 “So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died.” This is what happens if you disobey our all-loving God.
* All throughout Numbers, God leads the Israelites through land after land in an all out war against all other tribes. The numbers of the Israelites increase hugely during this time and they literally slaughter tens of thousands of people in their conquering, and let’s face it, this is all this is.

The Ten Commandments:

Let’s quickly review these ten tenets of Christianity, just in case you’ve forgotten them:

1. You shall have no other Gods before Me.
2. You shall not make yourself a carved image and bow down to or serve them.
3. You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath.
5. Honour your father and mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.
10. You shall not covet anything that is your neighbour’s.

First of all you may notice that this list can be divided into two quite distinct parts. The first part contains the first four commandments and the second part, the final six. Let’s take the second part first.

These six rules are actually all pretty basic, right? Honour your parents, don’t murder, don’t steal, things like that. A fairly big deal is made of the commandments but in essence, they are nothing more than rules any civilised society would codify in order to facilitate living together in harmony. I’m not saying that they aren’t important, just that they are fairly mundane. I mean, there’s nothing particularly earth-shattering or revelatory about ‘don’t steal’ right?

They aren’t special in that upholding them will turn you into a better or more spiritual person, closer to God. Upholding them will just make you what I would consider to be a normal, law-obeying citizen. They are nothing more than a part of the laws that our society has taken upon itself to codify and police, not because they’re Divine, but because without such laws a society could not function without breaking down into chaos. They are in fact, the difference between society and anarchy.

I’m also quite certain that God was not the first ruler to outlaw things like stealing and murdering. Other civilisations were living all over the place and they were all functioning at least reasonably well without God and His commandments. Bottom line: There is nothing special about the commandments. They could have and actually *have* come from many people, both before Moses heard of them and afterwards.

What about those first four? What do you think of them? The **only** purpose of those commandments is to ensure loyalty and fealty to God. I find it amazing that these four commandments are still taken seriously. These are not wise, Divine regulations for living happily or spiritually. Rather, they are the jealous demands of a covetous ruler fearful of losing his following. Each of these rules serves only to reinforce God’s reign over His people. There is no other purpose for them.

They remind me less of a benevolent Creator of the universe and more of a tyrannical human king seeking to dissuade his people from leaving his domain, by literally, making it against His laws (illegal) to do so. Think about it. The only kind of ruler, who has to use force and the law to keep his following, is one who is neither liked nor respected by the people. If God was the wonderful God that we are supposed to believe in, He wouldn’t have to devote almost half of His commandments to keeping His followers following Him.

Stories in the Bible

The Bible is replete with stories, some of which are certainly allegorical, like our earlier myths (but try telling that to a devout Christian), others of which seem based on likely events and still others which don’t just push the boundaries of credulity, but take a flying leap over them. We’ve already encountered the myth the whole of Christianity is based upon, the Garden of Eden and the Fall of Adam; here are a couple more to whet your appetite.

The Tower of Babel

Before I recount this story I would like to ask you two questions. First, do you think it would be a good thing if the whole world shared a language? Think about it. If this were the case we could communicate with people from other countries and cultures and enjoy and appreciate our rich diversities much more easily. It would almost certainly go a long way towards eliminating racism and ethno-centralism.

How about if we continue to work together across geographic boundaries to make great advances in science and technology along with medical discoveries and breakthroughs that benefit all humanity and help us fulfil our greatest desires? Would this be a positive thing? Of course this comes with the caveat that we not abuse anything or anyone in that quest nor use such gains in ways that would be considered detrimental to anyone or anything, but if we are all pulling together the chance for international conflict would be virtually non-existent.

Having hopefully stimulated a little thought along those lines let’s move on to the Tower itself.

What do you know of this story? Let me tell you what I thought it was all about before I read it firsthand. I thought that mankind had somehow acted in a thoroughly despicable way and offended God and as a result there was some kind of disaster at the Tower of Babel. I guess I didn’t know much about it, huh? Anyway, although I did not believe in God by the time I first actually read this story for myself, (when I was about twenty eight) I was nevertheless expecting a valid Biblical story showing God’s true wonderful nature and humanity’s terrible, sinful one. Boy, was I in for a shock. Although, I guess I got just what I asked for, I did get to see God’s true nature.

The actual story is much shorter than I imagined (it appears in Genesis 11) and starts off by stating that at this time the whole world had one language, one speech. The people of the planet got together and decided to build a massive tower to make a name for themselves lest they be “scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.” Seems like a fair plan, right? It sounds like they have reached a certain level of technical and construction ability and amazingly a single language united the entire planet.

Now, God came down and saw this great building and declared, “Indeed the people *are* one and they all have one language… now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.” That is how our benevolent God rewarded us for our scientific progress and for coming together as a single people of the Earth. Now, humankind has become united and can do anything they want. I can’t have that. It’s time to scatter them and confuse their language to keep them separate. This is direct biblical evidence of God deliberately and in His own words holding humankind back.

If you answered ‘yes’ to those questions I asked above, then you should be as dismayed and disgusted as I was when I first read this story.

Some hardcore believers may say that God was protecting us from ourselves. Just look at where our science has taken us. Well, that’s an interesting idea but let’s put it back in perspective. Imagine, you are a parent and your daughter is far ahead of her peers at school. Unfortunately, this ability is resulting in her being disliked amongst her friends. What do you do? Do you make her slow down so that she doesn’t learn faster than her peers or do you attempt to help her integrate better? The answer is obvious, isn’t it? And God, with all of His powers should be able to monitor things much more effectively than us, mere mortal parents.

Simple question; do the actions of the God in the Tower of Babel incident sound like the actions of the all loving Creator of the universe? You decide.

The Flood

Everybody has heard of Noah and his ark and everybody knows the basic premise of the story. God was displeased with the entire planet and decides to wipe everybody out and start again. Simple. Easy. But as with everything in religion, there are problems.

Do you really expect me to believe that every single person on the planet except Noah and his family, were evil and deserved to die? None were beyond redemption!?! Really, the truly best, most Divine bet was a complete, annihilating, worldwide flood? Seems unlikely.

Noah and his family built an ark that was apparently 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high. Now back in Noah’s day when they presumably didn’t have any large machinery or technical know-how, how in God’s name could they have pulled this feat off? There is no mention of any helpers and let’s face it, if you helped build the ark wouldn’t you think you’d be guaranteed a berth when it started raining? The only people on the ark were, “Noah, with his son’s, his wife, and his sons’ wives.” (Note that the men are all given top billing in this listing, the son’s coming before their mother). I find it a stretch to believe that a single family could build an ark of that size. Although, they did live for several hundred years, maybe…

Gen 6:19 “And of every living thing of all flesh you shall bring two of every *sort* into the ark, to keep *them* alive with you; they shall be male and female. 20 Of the birds after their kind, of animals after their kind, and of every creeping thing of the earth after its kind, two of every *kind* will come to you to keep *them* alive.” That’s God commanding Noah. So far so good, but then just a couple of verses later God speaks again… Gen 7:2 “You shall take with you seven each of every clean animal, a male and his female; two each of animals that *are* unclean, a male and his female; 3 also seven each of birds of the air, male and female.” So which was it God? Two of each or seven of each? Apparently God can contradict Himself.

Finally, is it feasible to believe that the animals all merrily trotted up to the ark in pairs and happily co-habitated for forty seven odd days? How did Noah round up these animals from all over the planet? Could there really have been enough room to accommodate two (or seven) of each species in this ark? Why didn’t the animals fight with each other? How did a single family feed and take care of them while the flood waters reigned? The only way to get around these questions is that old fail-safe, God did it. If you’re going to resort to that why didn’t he just cause every bad person on the planet to be vaporised instantly? Wouldn’t that have been much, much easier? Why go through the whole charade of a flood and the ark, and so on.

Flood myths abound in every culture so maybe this is compelling evidence for a period of severe flooding, possibly worldwide, several thousand years ago. But all of these cultures survived to tell of their myth so either God failed in wiping everybody out or He lied about doing so. Neither of these options seems appropriate for the God we are encouraged to believe in.

Samson and Delilah

This is a story that is quite different depending on whether you hear it in Church or read it from the Bible itself. Here’s what I learnt about Samson (I think from Sunday School) before I read the Bible. He was a good, noble, God-fearing man with long hair and as he was blessed by God he had superhuman strength. His strength was somehow tied in with his long hair. Anyway, he meets and falls in love with an evil woman called Delilah who deceives him in some way and cuts off his hair robbing him of his strength. He’s then oppressed or maltreated in some cruel way for a long time during which his hair grows back (unbeknownst to his foolish captors) and while all of his oppressors are gathered in the temple he pushes apart two massive pillars and collapses the entire place killing everyone inside, including himself.

Now, here’s the real story as told in Judges. Samson sees a Philistine woman in Timnah, the Philistines ruled over the Israelites at the time (God was displeased with the Israelites so he “delivered them into the hand of the Philistines” – this is how God treats His own people!), and decides he wants to marry her. (Of course, he didn’t actually love her, he was just seeking an excuse to attack the Philistines). Anyway, on the way down to Timnah he kills a young lion with his bare hands and on his way back there’s honey in the lion’s carcass. (Go figure!)

He decides to throw a seven-day wedding feast and thirty Philistines come. He poses them a riddle saying that if they can solve it within the duration of the feast he will give them thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothing. Vice versa if they can’t. Isn’t that gambling? Anyway, the riddle goes like this:  
      “Out of the eater came something to eat,   
      And out of the strong came something sweet.”

Now, correct me if I’m wrong but isn’t that a little unfair? How could they possibly know he was talking about the lion he killed and the honey that magically appeared later? Anyway, the ‘evil’ Philistines coerce Samson’s wife into getting Samson to tell her the answer and she, in turn, tells them. When they tell Samson the answer, this is what he says, “If you had not plowed with my heifer, You would not have solved my riddle!” (To be a good Christian do I have to call my wife a heifer?)

Samson is so angry about this he goes to another town and kills thirty (apparently innocent and just before their life ends, completely confused) men and steals their clothes to give to the Philistines who solved his riddle. (If you think I’m exaggerating any of this, I invite you to read it for yourself. This is a faithful re-telling!) After this, he leaves the town and goes back to his father’s. Samson’s wife’s father assuming Samson was over the whole wedding thing, gives her to another man. (Presumably in keeping with the sexist nature of the Bible, the daughter had no say in this).

A while later Samson returns and decides he wants his wife back but the father refuses, although he does offer him her younger sister. Nice. In retaliation Samson catches 300 foxes, (yes, 300! Don’t mess with Samson!) pairs them up and ties a burning torch between each pair’s tails. He then lets the foxes loose and they burn up all of the Philistine’s grain, vineyards and olive groves.

The Philistines get angry at Samson’s wife and father and burn them to death so Samson attacks the Philistines again and then goes into hiding. The Philistines go to Judah and demand Samson be given to them so he can account for his crimes. The men of Judah go and find Samson and explain the situation to him so he allows them to take him captive. They give him to the Philistines but then Samson breaks free from his bonds and with the jawbone of a donkey kills one thousand Philistines. (No word of a lie (from me at least), one *thousand* people! Even Sly Stalone on his best day couldn’t hold a candle to this guy!)

Later, Samson goes to Gaza and sleeps with a harlot (I don’t remember that being in the ten commandments).

Still later, he falls in love with Delilah but the lords of the Philistines recruit her to get Samson to reveal the secret of his strength to her. (If you thought the story was farfetched before, just wait until you read the next bit!)

1. Delilah asks Samson about his secret and he tells her, that if he is bound with seven fresh bowstrings he will become weak. Delilah obtains the bowstrings and ties him up with them. The Philistines attack but he easily breaks free of the bowstrings and fights them off. (Hmm, maybe your girl’s not so faithful Samson)
2. She asks him again and this time he tells her that if he is bound with unused rope he will become weak. Delilah ties him up again, with unused rope of course, and the Philistines attack again but, as before, he easily breaks free of the rope and fights them off. (Fooled a second time; okay, maybe he’s giving her one more chance)
3. Again, she asks and he tells her that if she weaves his hair into the web of a loom… Guess what, she does it and the same thing happens. (Okay, time to kick this girl to the curb Sammy. She’s tried to have you killed three times now!)
4. One more time Delilah asks and this time (why, I’ll never know) he tells her the truth, cut off his hair. Surprise, surprise she does this and Samson is blinded and captured.

The Philistines have a celebration some time later and they bring Samson out to perform for them. Sure enough, his hair has begun to grow back by now and he prays to God for the strength to kill all of the Philistines (and how could our bloodthirsty God deny such a request?). Pushing apart two massive pillars, he destroys the temple. The number of people he killed here was “more than he had killed in his life” so we’re talking more than at least 1,030 men. Congratulations Samson.

Now, first of all. This story, obviously, does not sound real to me, even if you can get over the honey in the lion and the super strong Samson killing a thousand men with the jawbone of a donkey. It sounds a little like another fairy tale, maybe, “The Boy Who Cried Wolf.” That boy tricks the townsfolk three times before they wise up to him; here Samson is deceived by Delilah four times in a row. Does that sound reasonable to you? Interesting how it kind of parallels Eve’s transgression in the Garden of Eden, too. Those evil women, they keep betraying us innocent men!

Also, does it sound reasonable to you that God would leave His hero just because someone cut his hair? Is this our magnanimous, all-loving God? I quote, “the LORD had departed from him.” How can people believe this stuff?

Third, Samson is supposed to be some kind of Divine hero, but he clearly acts in ways startlingly devoid of honour. First, he kills a lion. (Has the RSPCA read this?) He’s blessed by God. Couldn’t he defend himself without killing an innocent creature? Maybe the lion was sent by the devil… He then attempts to trick his wife’s people with his unfair riddle, and kills 30 innocent men in order to pay the debt. Are you kidding me? Next, he burns up all of the Philistines crops and kills a thousand of them. Are we still Godly here? Scratch Samson off my list of people to emulate.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ:

I wanted to open this section with a description of what happened and then look at the facts and see how they stack up with logic and common sense but unfortunately, it is impossible to get a single, reliable description. Jesus’ resurrection is documented in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and every one of them is different and I’m not talking about the position of the stone being different, I’m talking about two angels versus none or Mary going to Jesus’ tomb alone versus going with “the other Mary” and a woman called Salome or maybe a woman named Joanna. It seems to me that these are fairly big discrepancies to be in a Holy Book. Let me try and clarify things for you.

In Matthew, the two Marys (Mary Magdalene and James’ mother) go to Jesus’ tomb first. An angel descends from heaven and rolls back the stone before putting the guards to sleep. The angel tells the Marys to go get Jesus’ disciples and go to Galilee where Jesus will appear. On the way, Jesus appears to them and they worship him. He finally appears to everyone in Galilee.

Mark is pretty much the same except the two Marys go to Jesus’ tomb with a woman named Salome and there is no mention of the guards.

Luke says that the two Mary’s, a woman named Joanna and some other women (who remain unnamed) went to the tomb and there were two angels there. The first people Jesus appears to in Luke, are two of the disciples (it seems Simon and Cleopas) on the road to Emmaus, but they fail to recognise him.

In John, Mary Magdalene goes to Jesus’ tomb alone and there is no angel or guard but the stone has been rolled back and the tomb is empty. She runs out and finds Simon and another disciple and tells them Jesus’ body has been taken away. Simon Peter and the other disciple go and investigate. They find Jesus’ clothes but nothing else so they go home. Mary stays at the tomb and then two angels appear in the tomb. Jesus also appears behind her but she doesn’t recognise him at first. He later appears to the other disciples.

Now, which story is true? It’s all in the Bible so it’s all supposed to be true but clearly these differing accounts can’t all be valid. If the Bible’s not wholly accurate then everything in it comes into question and nothing can be taken on faith, just ‘because the Bible says.’

**The Old Testament vs The New Testament**

The differences between the Old and New Testaments are well-known and yet a lot of Christians tend to sweep these discrepancies under the carpet and pretend they don’t matter. When I told a Christian friend that I was reading the Bible, she actually asked me, “The Old or New Testament?” as if it should make a difference. At that time (I was only part way through the Old) I naively felt that it shouldn’t matter which Testament I was reading, shouldn’t I read them both? – after all, they were both from God, weren’t they? That was what I’d been told at least. Let’s look a bit closer:

The Old Testament begins at the beginning, when God was creating the Universe and spends several books relaying events that took place when God was still an active participant in earthly affairs. It is completely focused on a single race, the Israelites, and, at times, attempts to keep detailed genealogies and historical information.

After about seven books God tires of His “stiff-necked” people and tells them that He is abandoning them and they will be overrun by their enemies for their insolence. There is a definite attempt to keep God in the picture for the remainder of the Old Testament with various people, calling themselves prophets, claiming to have had dreams and communication with God. At this time all events, both good and bad are still being attributed to the clearly absent God. Some commentators have identified this as a period where the Israelites are attempting to cope with abandonment and are perhaps in a state of denial.

The New Testament picks up with Jesus and his teachings, which are actually radically different from anything the God of the Old Testament ever said. We’ll look at some of these differences in a moment. After Jesus’ death his apostles become fiendishly active, especially Paul who gets to work spreading the word of Christ and really builds the foundation for the Christian Church. It is interesting and important to note that a lot of the things we associate with Christianity, such as Heaven and Hell, and the notion that everyone can be saved by just believing in Jesus, never come into fruition until this period. Patience, patience, it’s all coming soon. Jesus and his followers really took Christianity from where it was in the Old Testament, a Jew-only mandate to follow this angry, wrathful God to the friendlier version we are more familiar with these days including dramatic promises of everlasting life… and terrible threats of everlasting torment.

Another classic contradiction lies in God’s covenant with us which He makes with Noah just after the flood. In Genesis 8, God promises that, “I will never again curse the ground for man’s sake, although the imagination of man’s heart *is* evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done.” Gee, thanks God, even though we’re evil from youth you won’t destroy us again. (I thought we were made in God’s image and likeness?) But the whole of Revelation is all about the releasing of all manner of terror on Earth and the mass genocide of millions of people and animals. A beast from the earth, one from the sea, locusts, plagues, it’s all coming. What happened to our covenant? Every Christian is eagerly waiting for this day foretold in Revelation but if it comes it only serves to make God a liar.

When you read the Old and New, from one to the other, it seems inescapably obvious that they are two totally different compilations. The Old Testament reads more like the history and events that befell a race and their dictator as they try to establish themselves in an unsettled environment. The second sounds exactly like what it is, a set of religious principles and commentaries and the forming of a Church based around those ideas.

**The Word of God**

Some Christians believe that the Bible was divinely inspired, that is, humans wrote the words but they were nothing more than tools through which God operated to deliver His message to us. Why He needed a tool is beyond me. If I was God, I think to erase all doubts I would just make a great book inlaid with gold and put it in the hands of every human on the planet overnight. I would also make something incontrovertible, like throwing in a 3-dimensional, holographic video on page 1 showing how He created the universe. Now that’s believable! But, as I said, for His own reasons, He chose to dictate it to a bunch of people in a largely illiterate part of the world (forget China – why wouldn’t He have headed there first?) and build it up over a number of years. Okay, we’ve already looked at the unlikelihood of that – let’s move on.

So let’s investigate this claim that the Bible is the word of God. Does it stack up with the evidence? If God created the Bible, shouldn’t it be basically perfect? I think so. Some people offer the weak excuse that God was working through imperfect humans and so any mistakes are due not to the Source, but to the filter. The result of this excuse is that, no matter how flawed the Bible is, God’s perfection is still preserved and people can still believe God dictated the book. How convenient!

First of all, that argument is complete nonsense. Do they really expect me to believe that God can create the universe and everything in it but can’t get a book into print on one of its planets in the exact form He wants? Hm. Does anybody else think something’s wrong with that? Secondly, it still doesn’t overcome the fact that the Bible *is* flawed (even if the flaw is in the mortal translation and not the Divine source), so it still raises the very real question as to how we can base something as important as our faith on it. If there are mistakes in the Bible (for whatever reason, God or human), *everything* in it must be questioned and not just accepted as gospel and if there *are* mistakes in it, then the Word of God argument crumbles away harmlessly.

So, we now have a situation that reads something like this; there is a Bible but it is just a mish-mash of different accounts of things that happened sometime in ancient history. It may be partially, historically accurate, that’s certainly how it reads in places, going into lengthy descriptions of family trees and lineages and so on, but because one thing is right in the Bible, that doesn’t mean that everything else is right. Of course, just because one thing is wrong in the Bible doesn’t mean that everything is wrong, either. I’m not suggesting that at all. What I am suggesting is that if one thing is wrong in the Bible, it’s no longer infallible and is certainly not the Word of God, for God could never be wrong. One mistake or contradiction is all we need to justify bringing our commonsense and prudence to the fore when we read it. Did the waters of the sea really part for Moses? Did people really live for hundreds of years? Did Jesus really walk on water?

So the next question is, “Is the Bible wrong?” There are two ways to tackle this. One is to see if the Bible/God asserts something that we don’t believe in and the other is to see if the Bible/God Himself is inconsistent in its/His message.

I have given many examples and quotes above that deal with issues like sex, sexism, animal sacrifices, slavery and so on and I think it would be a rare, hardcore Christian who could accept all of those. Nevertheless, imagining there is an unusual individual out there who believes in the severely punishing, murdering, jealous, warring God in the Bible and agrees with all of the sexism and slavery and concubines condoned by God Himself, we need to turn to the second prong; does the Bible contradict itself? If it can be shown to contradict itself in two separate passages, then one of those passages must be wrong and if one passage in the Bible can be wrong then others can be wrong as well and there is no way to discern the correct from the incorrect. The following are some of what I consider to be the biggest problems for believers. Some of these we have looked at earlier:

1. The double creation story fiasco. It is quite clear that only one of them can be right. Man can’t have been created both on the sixth day *and* sometime after the seventh day.
2. The fact that there are frequent references to other gods in the Bible. This is a huge problem for a religion which holds as one of its core principles that there is a single, all-powerful God. God Himself uses the plural terms, ‘Us’ and ‘Our’ on more than one occasion and even codifies the existence of other gods in the very first of His 10 commandments.
3. In Genesis 6, God clearly states that man would live to only 120 years old, but for many generations after this remark, Noah and his descendents live for considerably longer. And, if you consider the situation these days, we live for considerably less than 120 years and we used to live for only half of that span a mere few hundred years ago. It seems that no one in the history of the earth has lived for 120 years, as God mandated.
4. Jesus’ bloodline (a key part of the prophecies surrounding the birth of the saviour) is questionable. John 7:42 “Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David…” The Bible tells us that Jesus is a descendent of King David through Joseph, his father… now, correct me if I’m wrong but wasn’t Jesus born of God. Mary was supposed to be a virgin so how can he be a descendent of David? At best he is a descendent of Mary’s ancestors but he clearly has no blood ties to Joseph’s family.
5. The differing stories surrounding the resurrection of Jesus Christ. All of them can’t be right. Which ones are wrong?
6. Here is Jesus seeming to have two conflicting thoughts. In Matthew 10:32, he says, “Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. 33But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.” Only a few chapters earlier he says, “love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you” So, which is it. Turn your betrayers in to God or love them?
7. A huge problem for Christians and the main thrust of this chapter are the massive discrepancies between the old and the new testaments, specifically regarding a few of the things Jesus says. Check this out:

* Matt 5:38 “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ 39 But I tell you not to resist an evil person.” Now this is in direct contradiction to God in the Old Testament who clearly states the opposite, twice, in Exodus 21 and Leviticus 24. Jesus’ love thy enemy approach is definitely a big change from the old, tyrannical God we have come to know and love.
* Matt 8:3 “Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, “I am willing; be cleansed.” Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.” Compare this to God’s treatment of lepers; Lev 13:45 “Now the leper on whom the sore is, his clothes shall be torn and his head bare; and he shall cover his mustache, and cry, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’ 46 He shall be unclean. All the days he has the sore he shall be unclean. He is unclean, and he shall dwell alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.” Need I say more?
* Matt 5:44 “But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you.” Ah, like our Old Testament God punishes all non-believers to the seventh generation, or just plain obliterates them on the spot, right?
* Gen 17:14 “And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.” God’s words; now Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:19 “Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God *is what matters.*” So, which is it fellas?
* All throughout the beginning of the Old Testament, when God was still around, He is very clear that His people are the Israelites. He is not interested in any other races in the slightest. In fact, He commands that ‘His people’ slaughter every man, woman and child in one of their frequent wars. In Acts 10, Peter (formerly Simon) has a vision, which he interprets as meaning that non-Jews can now be saved. God changing his mind… again?

Now these are just a handful of cases from the Bible where there are clear discrepancies in the message. There are many more if you wish to search for them. What does this mean? Is the whole Bible rubbish? Not necessarily. But we now know that it’s not all perfect either. The Bible is flawed and if they want to maintain their flawless God, Christians are forced to concede that He did not write at least some of the Bible. Which parts did He have direct control over and we can therefore regard as being perfectly correct? No one can say for sure.

Unfortunately, with the Bible no longer the infallible word of God, most of the pillars of Christianity are shot to hell. The integrity of the Bible and its purported Divine author is the *only* reason to believe in things like a talking snake or an ancient paradise or a self-resurrecting son of God. Once the authorship of the Bible comes into question, the whole institution comes down like a house of cards. In many cases, without the Bible, even the evidence for God Himself becomes less certain, although that’s an issue we’ll debate a little later.

My own personal opinion is that the Bible is clearly a mixture of history and myth awkwardly glued together from a mismatch of various writings, spanning several time periods. I think, with a modicum of common sense, one can easily separate the myth (a wondrous God creating the universe in six days, breathing life into Adam, talking snakes, sons of God, etc) from the (at least attempted) historical facts. Unfortunately, as I said, once you take the folk tales from Christianity, you’re not left with much. Maybe that should tell us something...

**Who is God?**

I think we’ve done enough preliminary Biblical research now to take the next step (which I have purposely avoided until now) and clarify a very important term, central to our discussion; God. What exactly do people mean when they say, “God”?

Let me start by identifying some basic qualities that I think most Christians would agree with:

* God created the universe
* God is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent
* God is all loving
* God is eternal

These are fairly basic beliefs and certainly not exhaustive but a good starting point. I could pretty much accept all of these and if I was going to worship a God, this would probably be the one I’d go with. This Being (although I would hesitate to use the word Being as it sounds too much like a single entity and something like this God would most certainly be unlike any entity we can imagine) is deserving of the title God and is certainly deserving of our praise and adulation.

The biggest problem is proof. These are nice attributes and would make for a good God but what proof do we have that anything like this actually exists? If we’re honest with ourselves, there is absolutely no reason to believe in this God.[[3]](#footnote-4) Still, this is one nice blueprint and as far as Supreme Creators go, this is one Guy I would like to hang out with in Heaven, right? Let’s call this version our ‘ideal God’.

But, is this the God of the Christians?

While most Christians would say it is, I however would say it most certainly is not. Why do I say that? We need look no further than the Bible for our evidence. Fortunately there is an awful lot of material in the Bible (at least until early Judges) which is supposed to record the deeds and words of God Himself. This is always a mistake for a religion because unless they really *do* have the word of God, there are bound to be problems, especially if it was written a long time ago, when people and their thoughts were quite different from ours today (not to mention a lot more naive). Let’s see what the Bible has to tell us about the Christian God.

The Christian God

I have already gone into quite a bit of detail in earlier sections quoting various things from the Bible and I won’t repeat myself here, so assuming you have read the earlier sections (or even better, the Bible itself, then you’ll get a real feel for the ‘flavour’ of it) we’ll just jump straight into my definition of the ‘Christian God’.

First of all, the Christian God is a man. He is most certainly male and nowhere in the Bible is that notion *ever* questioned. The idea that God is our father/mother is a contemporary one and certainly doesn’t come from the Bible. God is **always** referred to as a man and the pronoun “He” is **always** used. Politically correct humans have amended this little idea with no input from God. Even Jesus refers to God only as his Father, **never** as his Mother.

Second, the Christian God experiences human emotions and is also susceptible to at least some human weaknesses as well. He Himself says He is jealous and He also says that He was sorry He created the Earth (hence the flood in Genesis 7). By the way, these are direct quotes from God. So we have here a God who experiences at least both jealousy and regret.

Now, regret indicates a mistake or at least something done in error, so God is clearly *not* infallible. You cannot feel regret over something that turns out perfect and exactly the way you planned it, which you would imagine is how God would conduct things. So, if God felt regret then something either wasn’t perfect or didn’t happen the way He planned. Now, neither of those things is supposed to happen, so we have a problem. And by ‘we’ I mean ‘Christians.’

The jealousy issue is a little more complicated but it reveals two things. First it underlies a counterfeit form of love, for true love (whatever it actually is and whether it actually exists or not) should at least be immune to jealousy. Jealousy attempts to control and restrict another while true love should always empower and free the one loved. So the purity of God’s love comes into question here (we’ll deal with this more later) but jealousy also arises because one feels threatened. Without another person/thing/(God?) there can be no jealousy and even in the presence of a third party a completely secure person will not experience jealousy. Of course, this highlights the flip side of the coin revealing that only insecure people can be jealous. Jealousy and insecurity come hand in hand; where there is one, the other is always present (or at least waiting in the wings) but if one is absent the other will also be nowhere in sight. They are a tag team on the squad of human weaknesses. The inescapable conclusion from all of this is that God is insecure. “Impossible,” Christians shout, but if you think about jealousy for just a second you will realise it is an ugly, petty, decidedly human emotion and everything I have said about it is true.

I can almost hear the Christians complaining even as I’m writing this, “No, no, God did say He was sorry but He was just putting things into human terms so we could understand,” or “God’s ‘jealousy’ shows how much He loves us”. All nonsense. There is no way out of it. Christians repeatedly tell us to believe in the Bible and follow the Bible. That means reading the Bible and being honest about it; not twisting the words and distorting the message so that it comes out telling us exactly what you want it to. This is exactly what it says in the Bible. I’m not inventing excuses, reasons or justifications to support my own opinions and beliefs. I’m following a simple plan that many Christians will be unfamiliar with. It is made up of two parts; look... and read. Simple really.

Others might claim that parts of the Bible are written using symbols and allegory. God’s ‘jealousy’ might be like a mirror reflecting humanity’s own vice. I would completely, 100% agree with that; the Bible is certainly composed of a lot of symbolic and allegorical stories that obviously have no basis in fact. That’s what I’ve been saying all along. The trick is in getting Christians to face the obvious symbolism and mythical stories for what they are. The problem is that they will always claim fact, when quoting something they want to believe happened and claim parable or symbol, when something comes up that contradicts their belief or their doctrines. Win, win; but also lie, lie.

Third let’s look at the three O’s; omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence. God is all powerful. How does that stack up with what our revered Bible says? Well, I don’t know about you but I’m disappointed that the snake managed to slip into the Garden of Eden right under God’s nose, as it were and corrupt his children. As I have already discussed, God seems quite surprised in Genesis and inquires of Adam as to who told them they were naked before punishing the snake for his actions.

Now, if you think that God sent the snake, or at least ‘allowed’ it into the Garden as some form of test for them (we already know our God likes testing his followers) then let me ask you this; what would you think of a women who goes away on a business trip and sends her beautiful friend (whom her husband has never met) to her husband’s place of work to attempt to seduce the unsuspecting man. Would you say that she is Godly? Divine? I doubt it.

Still in Genesis, after kicking Adam and Eve from the Garden, He places a cherubim with a “flaming sword” at the gate to keep them out. Why does an omnipotent God need a guard with a weapon?

Why does God make Moses and the Israelites wander through the desert and fight nation after nation to get to the Promised Land? I mean he could have saved a whole lot of bloodshed (both of the Israelites and their ‘enemies’) with a snap of his fingers as an omnipotent God could have. Maybe the survivors of this whole crazy ordeal would thank God at the end of it for making them strong and teaching them so many grand lessons, but all the thousands of people who died and would never make it to the Promised Land or see their friends or families again may have a slightly different perspective.

How about omniscience? Is God really all-knowing? Num 13:2 “Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel.” That’s God talking right there. Sounds like He’s strategising for a military campaign and don’t forget the Sodom and Gomorrah incident where God sent in two of His angels to assess the situation, “I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me.”

Don’t forget in Genesis how God is looking for Adam, who’s hiding from Him, and proceeds to ask him a few questions to get to the bottom of things.

How about this? Do you remember the Passover? Do you know why it’s called the Passover? God commands Moses to tell the Israelites to mark their houses with blood so that, “when I see the blood, I will **pass over** you.” (Ex 12:13, my boldface) and they would be spared the tenth plague that God would visit on the Egyptians. Shouldn’t an omniscient God at least know where His people are?

And maybe the most telling of them all; God commanding Abraham to sacrifice his son to test his faith. That act serves no one except God. It certainly doesn’t benefit Abraham or his son at all, in fact, if I was Abraham’s son I would be seriously ticked off about the whole incident and what not be attending many subsequent family reunions!

Similar reasoning applies for omnipresence. If God (and therefore love) is everywhere, then where is Satan? Love and Hate are opposites as are God and Satan so how can these polar opposites co-exist in the same place at the same time? (This particular issue arouses some rather inventive and creative excuses in the minds of some Christians)

The fact is that all throughout the Old Testament (especially in the first few books, which are the only places in the Bible where God actually appears), God continually behaves like a flesh and blood being. Although He does seem more powerful and a whole lot smarter than our primitive ancestors, He nevertheless exhibits very human weaknesses and very human tendencies. If you don’t believe me, read the Bible. In a sensible reading, it’s inescapable.

Fourth, how all-loving is the Christian God? Well, clearly He has His special ‘chosen people.’ He constantly reinforces that specialness to Abraham and all of his descendents. Now, just ask yourself if you will; does it seem reasonable to you that an all-loving God who has created the entire universe and populated our little planet with a plenitude of humans, would exclude most of them and bestow special favours on one single race? To me, this is ludicrous.

First of all, God supposedly loves *all* of His children (at least that’s what I was taught in Sunday School) and secondly what kind of Divine, All-mighty God advocates a policy of separatism and elitism? Let’s face it, that’s what we’re dealing with here. God is clearly valuing the Israelites above all other races; He has adopted them as ‘His People’ and He takes care of them in ways that He does not do with the other races. Is that an all-loving policy? Ex 19:5 “you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people.”

Would an all-loving God sentence those who refuse to worship Him to hell or just kill them outright? He kills thousands and thousands of His *own* people, the ‘special treasure’ Israelites, not even considering how many enemies of His people He was responsible for annihilating. But even that is not enough “love” for our God. He also has to punish the remainder who still don’t bow to Him and burn enough prime crops and livestock in His name, to an eternity of pain and torture in hell. Now, we’re not even talking about a day of torture, or a year of torture but an *eternity* of torture. That makes me laugh even as I write it. The very notion is absolutely ridiculous and why an all-loving God would sentence anyone (saint or sinner) to even a second of pain, is completely beyond me. I would never consider subjecting even my worst enemy to any degree of torture (let alone an eternity of it!) and I don’t certainly don’t consider myself more loving than God.

Also, just in case you didn’t know, the God of the Old Testament **never**, ever once mentions hell. He threatens with things like physical, earthly pain, poverty, enemies controlling you, and “visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth *generations* of those who hate Me.” The promises of a fiery hell would have to wait for Jesus the Christ. God Himself never once promises Heaven after death either. That promise also comes from the Messiah. Interesting huh? (But I am getting ahead of myself)

Christians will often say something like, “God doesn’t actually sentence you to hell, you do,” and I really think this is the biggest cop out of all time and no one with even an ounce of sense would accept it. God absolutely has the ability to save us, the Guy’s omnipotent!? No Christian believes that even if the Devil gets his claws into us God couldn’t save us if He wanted to, because that would mean the Devil is stronger than God. So God *can* save us but for some obscure reason God wants us to go to Him of our own freewill, right? That’s usually how the argument goes.

So, let’s say you have a daughter who found some matches and has a penchant for playing with them. (I know, I know, again with the matches…) Now, you tell her of the dangers and constantly warn her about it but she refuses to heed your advice. Naturally, you don’t take away the matches because you want your daughter to have ‘freewill.’ So, one day when she is happily playing with her matches, she accidentally sets fire to her clothes. In mere seconds she is completely on fire and you just happen to have a bucket of water with you. Question: what do you do? Do you stand by and shake your head, tsk tsking, because she didn’t listen to you of her own freewill, or do you stop being a monster and put the poor girl out of her misery? Enough said, right?

It’s an extreme analogy but it’s nevertheless quite relevant. It is exactly what God is doing although there is one small difference between the Christian way of thinking and my example. In my example, your daughter found the matches on her own but in Christianity; God (being the Creator and Orchestrator of everything) actually creates the matches and causes the girl to find them in the first place. In their attempted explanations, Christians end up making a mockery of their own God.

It’s also interesting that in the whole of God’s dialogues He **never** once mentions love. Not once. Oh, I’m sorry He does talk about having love for Him and for your neighbours, but not once does He Himself purport to love us. His spokesmen (especially Moses) do, but God Himself not once mentions His love for us. Not once does He console His people with kind words, He merely threatens with a damn big stick and leads with the carrot of being able to defeat all of their enemies, reach the Promised Land and have the chance to be fruitful and multiply. Just stop and think about that for a second. In all of the dialogue we have from God, He never once says He loves us. It’s hard to believe, but there it is; only other humans have told me that God loves me.

Conclusion, the God of the Christians is not a loving God. I’m not even sure He knows what the word means.

Fifth the God of the Christians is most definitely a God of war. He leads the Israelites on a series of brutal campaigns to claim land (not a spiritual war to cleanse the land of sinners mind you, but bloody, savage pillaging just to claim land that God has promised His people). These are Gods instructions in Num 33:52 “then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, destroy all their engraved stones, destroy all their molded images, and demolish all their high places; 53 you shall dispossess *the inhabitants of* the land and dwell in it.” And He follows it up with, “if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall be that those whom you let remain *shall be* irritants in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall harass you in the land where you dwell. 56 Moreover it shall be *that* I will do to you as I thought to do to them.” Heavy stuff, huh?

In case you’re wondering how severe this campaign was. Check out this report from Deuteronomy 2:34 “We took all his cities at that time, and we utterly destroyed the men, women, and little ones of every city; we left none remaining.” Enough said.

Sixth, the God of the Bible is vindictive, merciless and extremely wrathful demanding absolute obedience and severely punishing anyone who fails to deliver. He is a ruthless tyrant who rules with an iron fist and the fact is that if we read about Him in a history book and His traits were attributed to some despot from the past we would find Him totally repulsive. If you’re still unsure about this claim check out Leviticus 26. That’s some scary stuff there!

So, the God of the Christians (at least if we read the Bible) turns out to be quite different from our Ideal God. What’s really funny is that many Christians actually accept some of these crazy notions, like the fact that God is jealous and you must be afraid of His wrath and what’s even funnier is that other notions they completely ignore, like the evidence that God is not omnipotent, omnipresent or omniscient and is definitely not all-loving. That last one confounds me no end.

It’s actually a tragically humorous story because Christians are really stuck between a rock and a hard place. If they reject the terrifying God of the Bible then the source of their dogma, the Bible, becomes a joke but if they accept that God, then they turn God Himself into a joke. I guess that someone, somewhere and at sometime decided it was better to preserve the Bible. This strategy kind of makes sense because two thousand years ago most people probably weren’t savvy enough to think critically about this kind of thing and it wasn’t so unusual to believe that the Gods were fighting and bickering amongst themselves, like the Greek or Roman gods, so people were already used to their deities behaving like humans. At that time, I imagine it would have been a rare man or woman who would have asked, “How could Gods be as petty as a human?” or “Exactly what evidence is there to suggest that this God exists?” Fortunately, we’ve come quite a long way since then…

Throughout the rest of this book I will sometimes disregard the God of the Christians because there are so many problems and obvious logical inconsistencies associated with defining an all-loving Creator of the universe this way. At other times I will use the God of the Christians for no other reason than because it is what Christians believe and as such an important part of the faith, He cannot be overlooked for too long when discussing Christianity.

However, if I was going to start praising God tomorrow it would have to be the ideal, all-loving God who shows no biases, *truly* loves all people and doesn’t see the need nor does He have the inclination to send people to a fiery hell for all of eternity if they don’t worship Him in the correct way. To define *the* God, Creator of the universe in any other way just doesn’t make sense.

**Part Two – Christianity**

**What is Christianity?**

What makes Christianity tick? What do you have to believe in to be a Christian? This question is deceptively complicated and tends to undermine the whole message before we’ve even had a chance to hear it…

“Come and believe in my God, He’s a real nice guy!”

“No, he’s wrong! My God is the real one!”

“Hey, they’re both dreaming. Read the Bible, it clearly supports my God”

And that’s just different factions of Christianity arguing amongst themselves! But there must be some principles/ideas/beliefs that make a Christian, even if all of them aren’t applicable to all Christians all the time. This is my hit list of things to believe if you want to be a Christian:

Myths of Christianity

1. God exists and loves us
2. The Devil exists and is the exact opposite of God
3. The Holy Ghost/Holy Spirit exists
4. Original sin exists and afflicts every human
5. Jesus Christ was Real and was the Son of God
6. Jesus Christ died for our sins
7. The Bible is trustworthy and therefore accurate
8. Heaven and Hell exist – Christians will go to Heaven, sinners will go to Hell
9. Jesus Christ will return to Earth at some time and save his followers

Next, I want to dissect these beliefs a little and see how they stack up to our logical, sensible approach.

God Exists and Loves Us

That’s pretty basic, right? You’ve got to have some kind of belief in a single, governing Deity to be Christian. I just wonder what evidence there is for this omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient God. In actuality there isn’t any, and for a Being like God, I find that lack of evidence extremely strange.[[4]](#footnote-5)

If God came to me and told me He existed and had a good old chat with me, now that I’d believe! If God is my Almighty Father, where is He and why don’t I have a personal relationship with Him? Christians always say you’ve got to open your heart to Him before He can come. That’s nonsense. On a personal level, I’m not a saint that’s for sure, but I’m definitely not a bad guy (even Christians I know would vouch for me, although they would possibly sell me out if God was doing the asking, in true Jesus fashion) and for a long time as a child I had a belief in God I inherited from my father which I didn’t question until I was old enough to think for myself. Even then I was never far from spirituality and for more than a decade after that, all throughout my twenties, I had a solid belief in some kind of pervasive force/entity that a loving God could definitely have fit the bill for. I tried for a long time to experience this but was denied at every juncture. Finally, I gave up, not because I wanted to but because eventually you have to stop banging your head against a brick wall. I was one of the most open people you could have ever met, patiently waiting amidst active searching for any signal or sign from God to welcome me into His arms. Such a welcoming never came and eventually I was forced to conclude that if God exists, He’s hiding from me.

If you think about it why should I even have to be ‘good’ (whether that means obeying the commandments or just not breaking any of society’s laws) before God will come to me? Wouldn’t it be better if God showed Himself to everybody, *especially* the bad people? If God revealed Himself to the criminals before they committed crimes, if He supported them and loved them and guided them, there would be no criminals. The opportunity is there for God to impact humanity on both a deeply personal level and a more general societal level, and yet He doesn’t.

The question remains. Where is God?

Christians tell us He is ‘hiding’ because He wants us to go to Him out of freewill, not because we have to. This is a ridiculous argument. Freewill implies that I have all of the information and am making a conscious decision. If God is hiding from us, we no longer have all of the information. We have rampant speculation and conjecture, we have two thousand year old stories, but we don’t have any facts. Showing me the facts before I make my choice doesn’t make my choice any less free.

Imagine you are filling out your application forms for university and they ask you to choose your major from a list of subjects. The problem is that to save space, the subjects are not written in words, but using one or two letter abbreviations. There is no more information available and when you try to call the university, you keep getting an unhelpful automated response. You ask your friends and they all have many interesting theories as to which abbreviations represent which subjects but ultimately it is your choice. You do the best you can and send the application letter away.

Two weeks later, you receive a letter in the post from the university and discover that you’ve been accepted into the How Grass Grows major at the School of Gardening. Dismayed, you ring (surprisingly you get through) and complain that you don’t want to study how grass grows. They inform you that you had complete free choice in your decision and since the application has already been processed, there’s nothing they can do about it now. Would you feel as though you’ve been treated fairly?

The point in the analogy is that free will alone means nothing. If God has disappeared so that I have to take a leap of faith to eventually find Him, then He is just not a very nice God. There is nothing contradictory about God appearing before me that I may truly know Him, and my having freewill in my decision.

Another point is that if God existed why should I have to go to Him through some specific religion or belief system? Why would He demand any kind of affiliation like that? If He loves me and I’m a good person, why would He not reach out to me? And if He does have preferences, why can’t He just tell me which one is the ‘correct’ religion or that they’re all ‘correct’ or that none of them are? Why can’t He tell me anything!? How powerful is God if He can’t talk to me and how loving is He, if He won’t?

Just look at another analogy. If my father left my mother when I was very young, so young that I had no memories of him, and never tried to contact me, is he a good father? Let’s make it even more relevant. Let’s say my father is waiting for me to attend a particular university before he will contact me because he feels that one particular university is the only one that will turn me into a man. Unfortunately, this one ‘correct’ university is hidden amongst hundreds of other universities and my father not only never told me of this university, he didn’t even tell me I had to go to a university before he will contact me. It’s my friends who have been telling me that I have to enrol, but I have friends in all the universities and they all tell me that my father is at theirs. Is this man a great father? Bottom line: If the father is absent, would you blame the child for that?

This is exactly what Christians are claiming. God exists and he’s waiting for you to reach out to him through (funnily enough) their church. It is your fault because you’re not open to God. God is trying to make a relationship with you but you are closed to Him. That’s what Christians say. It just doesn’t make sense on any level and the analogy clearly highlights that. What’s more, Christians know it doesn’t make sense and so they start getting inventive. One Jehovah’s Witness told me that God abandoned humans because it was what we wanted. We wanted to be left alone and do things on our own, so He merely complied. That’s convenient, but I don’t remember being included in this decision, was I absent from school that day?

Ah, they have an answer for that too; my ancestors made that decision for me. Is that right? Is that fair? What kind of person (let alone a loving parent, let alone a loving God!) punishes someone for decisions made by their father’s, father’s, father’s (insert a few more, ‘father’s’ here) father? This sounds exactly like what it is, an excuse; and it falls apart as soon as you examine it critically.

The fact that there is still argument over whether or not God exists, after two thousand years, is compelling evidence that He doesn’t. Are we still arguing over the existence of unicorns and dragons? Of course not. No one has ever seen either and that’s enough for us. Do we still debate which God is mightier, Zeus or Jupiter? Of course not. We have since realised that they are fantasy. God falls into this same category, only He has taken on a role more important and more sophisticated than His predecessors. He no longer fights with His siblings because He is the only one; He no longer pushes the sun across the sky or makes the weather, because science can do those things for us; He now just protects (some of) us from a distance and waits to catch us in Heaven when we die. God has graduated from playing with and tormenting us, to providing us with everlasting happiness after death, a much more adult, serious task. But, more serious or not, like His predecessors, He is still a myth. We outgrew them and I hope that, in time, we will outgrow Him.

All excuses and phoney explanations aside, here’s the situation, I don’t know that God exists but He knows that I exist. There is absolutely nothing stopping Him from fostering a close, personal relationship with me. I certainly wouldn’t turn God away if He came to me (who would?) and yet, no such relationship exists because He has never reached out. I must only conclude from this that either God doesn’t care much for humanity (or at least me) or He doesn’t exist.

Bottom line; there is absolutely no irrefutable evidence that God exists and for a Being as magnificent and loving as God is supposed to be, there really should be.

The Devil Exists and is the Exact Opposite of God

This is just as important a doctrine as the belief in God. Satan rears his head a few times in the Bible, most notably as the snake in Genesis (I’ll come back to this in a moment) and then again when he tempts Jesus in the desert.

The idea of Satan is in keeping with the Christian tradition of using fear as a key motivator in doctrine. Apparently the idea that an all powerful God exists and rules everywhere and over everything is just too simple.

In fact, one of the first things that tipped me off to the nonsensical nature of Christianity was when I thought about this whole good versus bad, God versus Satan story. If I was honest with myself, it just sounded like a B movie or a fantasy novel. It had that unmistakable tang of human invention. There’s a bad guy kicking around getting ready to take over the world... but hold up! The good guy will come to the rescue, ala Revelations, and he’ll eventually save the day in the eleventh hour. I mean, I really felt that if I was going to believe in God and the Devil, I should probably start believing in hobbits and goblins at the same time. Hell, if JRR Tolkien had a publicist like Paul, maybe we’d all be searching for the one ring and looking out for Sauron, instead of praying in Church!

Honestly, there is again, absolutely no reason to believe in any being going by the name Satan. I mean, has anyone ever seen him? Of course not. He falls into the same category as the bogeyman and the monster under your bed. The only difference is that he comes in the package that we call Christianity, and this ubiquitous religion has become so deeply ingrained into our collective consciousness that anything which comes with it becomes automatically accepted, bypassing the natural, healthy scepticism with which we examine everything else.

What’s really amazing is that Christians so happily accept the (actually unacceptable) doctrine that the Devil is running around trying to turn as many people away from God and the Light as he can, seemingly right in front of God, and yet God does nothing about it. Christians maintain that God is everywhere and all powerful and yet, here is God’s complete opposite, running around causing mischief on Earth while he has his very own realm, Hell, in which he is collecting human souls to torture and torment for all eternity. Now correct me if I’m wrong, but if the Devil exists in Hell, then there has to be someplace (and it should be pretty big, because a lot of people must have already gone there) where God cannot be. This undeniably strips God of his coveted three O’s (omnipresence, omnipotence and omniscience).

Let’s just think sensibly. The Devil and his home are the opposite of God and His, therefore God cannot be everywhere. It’s simple. Of course, Christians start to get inventive here saying things like, “God is still everywhere because He is like the air through which the Devil moves” or, “God is *allowing* the Devil to exist as part of His grand plan.”

Have you ever told a lie? Sorry to change topic on you like that, but I promise it will (eventually) relate. Of course, you Christians out there probably can’t relate to this (protected by Jesus as you are) but for the rest of us, if you have... sorry, *when* you did, you would have undoubtedly learnt that a lie is best kept simple. The more convoluted your lie gets, the harder it is to make everything match up and holes start appearing, right? But you will have also noticed that a lie is extremely hard to keep simple, especially if someone (like me) is sticking their nose in and asking all manner of annoying questions. And so you find yourself forced to start inventing more lies to back up the initial one until you find yourself buried so deep in lies that you can’t find your way out again. This is exactly what we find happening when Christians are asked to explain how an all-powerful, all loving God can exist at the same time as Satan and Hell.

And back to the lies...

God is like air. Defined in this way, God exists everywhere, including Hell, because He is the framework upon which the Devil walks and Hell is built. He is like the canvas and the artist; nothing can exist on the canvas without existing on/in God at the same time. This is very poetic and sounds wonderful but if we’re honest about it, it is just more fictional reasoning used to defend an original fiction? Sure, it could be true... but it could also be true that snakes are flying around on Neptune. Let’s look at probabilities people. We need to be accepting the probable, not the possible but immensely unlikely. That’s just basic commonsense, isn’t it? The *only* thing this assumption does is protect Christianity from my claim that God and the Devil cannot co-exist. It’s a wonderful thought and would be an even more wonderful one if it were true, but let’s restrict ourselves to commonsense.

The more critical and observant among you may have noticed that I haven’t actually *disproven* this defence by appeal to a ubiquitous God. This is a good point but rests on a fallacy. Is it up to me, maintaining the negative position, i.e. that something does *not* exist, to prove this? If you think about it for just a second you will realise that it is actually categorically impossible to prove something to be false; that is, to prove a negative.[[5]](#footnote-6) I literally cannot prove that dragons and unicorns don’t exist either, it’s impossible, but it is possible to prove that they do exist. Of course, this proof is absent, hence the fact that we don’t build our houses to be resistant to dragon fire. The burden of proof is **always** on the person making the claim in the positive. If such proof is impossible then we have crossed from a search for knowledge to a defence of fantasy. If there cannot be any proof (not just ‘isn’t’ but the stronger ‘*cannot be*’) to a claim then there is no commonsense check on it and it can easily be defended forever, even if it is false.

Outside of religion there is no other field where the burden of proof falls to those denying a claim. A physicist doesn’t sit in his ivory tower, proclaim that things can travel faster than the speed of light and expect non-believers to step up and try to disprove him. It doesn’t even make sense, yet this is exactly what we see and hear from Christians all the time.

Moving onto another defence; God is allowing the Devil to exist, perhaps to tempt us so that He can find only those who are truly devoted to Him. Well, this automatically calls into question the nature of God’s love. Just how loving can a Being be, who is allowing something as terrible as Satan to be running around willy-nilly, influencing as many of His children as he possibly can, and dragging some of us (probably most of us, if any, and only, one religion is right) down to his denizen where he is master? Did God need to make failure to follow Him come with such an outrageous punishment? Was it not God who said, “An eye for an eye”? Indeed, according to God Himself, the punishment should fit the crime. How could anyone have committed a crime deserving a punishment as terrible as an eternity of suffering and torture in Hell? Clearly they couldn’t, and the lie is once more revealed.

Oh, I almost forgot. God, (like everything else in Christianity) never once mentions anything about the Devil. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to Jesus for that teaching. This is just another gap in God’s teaching. He told us what animals we were allowed to eat, went into incredible detail as to how we were to make offerings to Him, proposed pages and pages of rules and regulations for us, but forgot to tell us to beware of the Devil. Does that make sense to you?

“Oy! What about the serpent in the Garden of Eden!” Yes, what about him? I don’t believe it was Satan. Wow! How’s that for blasphemy! At this point, I’m going to refer you to the Bible, Genesis 3. If you have read that section you will notice that no one ever refers to the serpent as anything but ‘the serpent.’ Here are two interesting quotes that reference it:

* “Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made.” Gen 3:1
* “So the LORD God said to the serpent:

“Because you have done this,

You are cursed more than all cattle,

And more than every beast of the field;

On your belly you shall go,

And you shall eat dust

All the days of your life.”” Gen 3:14

Now, the first of those quotes clearly equates the serpent with the beasts of the field. This is certainly far removed from the fallen angel tale we are told in Church.

The second quote is even more conclusive because it comes directly from God Himself. God again compares the serpent to cattle and sentences it to slither on its belly for all of its days. The questions you need to ask yourself are would God compare Satan to cattle and has He sentenced the Devil to slithering for “All the days of [his] life?” The answer on both counts is a resounding, no.

This tale just doesn’t make any sense at all when interpreted the way that Christians believe but makes perfect sense when interpreted as a cultural myth, which I’ve already explained.

So, the point of all this? God never mentions Satan. Not once. Very odd considering the amount of talking that God does at the beginning of the Old Testament. The unavoidable conclusion is that the evidence for the Devil is even flimsier than that for God. We need to purge ourselves of this ‘bogeyman for adults’ because he strikes fear into the hearts of grown-ups who should know better. And who did we turn to when we were afraid of the monster in our closets? Mum and Dad, right? And, now that we are Mums and Dads ourselves, where can we turn? Fortunately, the Church has given us the ultimate parent in God. It’s time to grow up. We aren’t kids anymore, we need to stop believing there’s a monster hiding under our bed, whether we call it the bogeyman or Satan.

The Holy Ghost/Holy Spirit Exists

This is a bit of a confusing issue, even amongst Christians. Christians believe in the Holy Trinity; that is God (the father), Jesus (the son) and the Holy Ghost (or the Holy Spirit, both terms refer to the same thing). The problem is that the Holy Ghost is a bit of a nebulous area. It’s supposed to be something like the Spirit of God. I’m not sure exactly how this differs from God Himself. If God isn’t His Spirit then what is He? It’s as confusing as (excuse the pun – again) hell to me.

This doctrine was codified in something called the Nicene Creed which was formulated by Bishops of the Church who convened in 325A.D.[[6]](#footnote-7) There was also a second meeting which occurred in 381 which was basically an expansion on the first.

There are references to the Holy Ghost in the Bible but it’s far from clear exactly what it is. Notably, the Holy Ghost was implicated in the conception of Jesus and in Acts on the Day of Pentecost when Jesus’ disciples speak in tongues. Deciding the role this mysterious ‘Holy Spirit’ was to play in Christianity was left to the Bishops at the Nicene Council. And truth be told, I don’t think they knew either.

In the Nicene Creed of 381 the Holy Ghost is called the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father. What does that mean?! It is also thought to proceed from the Son and it therefore implies that it is consubstantial (more confusing terminology that alleges the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are one and the same thing)[[7]](#footnote-8) and co-eternal with the Father and the Son.

The above is what happens when you abandon reason and commonsense in decision making. You end up with meaningless definitions that clarify nothing. After reading the above explanation of the Holy Spirit, you will notice that you are no closer to understanding what it is than you were before. It’s not a part of God, because God can’t be divided (it is consubstantial with the Father and the Son), so it must be all of God. But it can’t be that either or else giving it a different name serves no purpose.

The truth is that beyond pointing out how ludicrous the whole notion of a Holy Spirit is, there’s not much to say because no one really knows what it is anyway. How can I show the Holy Spirit is nonsense when there is nothing to argue against? It doesn’t actually do anything that can’t be attributed to God, which it’s supposed to be anyway. Of course, the flip side of this is that there is also nothing to recommend it aside from the Bible, which we have seen to be a very poor guide indeed. Remove the Holy Spirit from Christianity and everything functions just as smoothly as it did before, it is a truly redundant concept.

In trying to codify everything clearly the Church fathers just made it all sound more fallacious. It sounds exactly like what is; weak human attempts to explain a fairytale in some rational way. And we haven’t even touched on the subject of how Jesus is related to God yet, more on that later. That story gets even crazier…

Original Sin Exists and Afflicts Every Human

The concept of original sin is a lovely notion, isn’t it? Different denominations view it in different ways but it basically says that every human born is born into a condition of sinfulness and even if the person never once commits a sin they still have the bane of original sin attached to them. Thanks Eve. As a result of this, none of us can ever redeem ourselves on our own. Guess what we must do to be redeemed? You got it. Become a Christian. How convenient for Christians.

Well, first of all neither God nor Jesus ever mentions original sin even once. Don’t you think such an important doctrine as original sin would be one of the first things on their list of ‘pearls of wisdom’ to impart? Apparently not.

Looking beyond this revealing fact, what possible reasons are there to believe in this doctrine? Like everything else associated with Christianity, there are no reasons at all.

The people who first told us of original sin are the only people who stood to benefit from it, the Church fathers. Is that not immediately suspicious? If I told you that to have a wonderfully happy life you had to join my club, would you do it? Of course not. What if I told you that to have a wonderfully happy life you had to join someone else’s club? Well, you’d probably still think it was nonsense, but it certainly carries more weight when I’m not the one to directly benefit from your patronage. Christianity is a perfect example of the first case; those who stand to benefit from people holding a certain belief are the ones promoting just that belief. One word says it all… dodgy.

Just think about what the concept of original sin does and you’ll understand why Christians make such a big deal out of it. We’re all born into sin. First up, we’re all innately flawed and collectively guilty. We are set up as weak, powerless and guilty. Very susceptible. Phase one complete.

Then phase two kicks in, sinners cannot get into Heaven and original sin is codified into your soul so you can never escape it on your own. This brings in the fear that so characterises all of Christianity. Fear of not getting into Heaven and fear of being tortured by the Devil for all eternity. Heavy stuff!

Time for phase three; the solution. Fortunately there is a way out of this tragic mess. Just go to Church, the Christian Church mind you, not one of those other sinful Churches! Give your faith, your devotion (and your money) to the Church and all will be peachy. Mission complete.

Just think about it for a second. Why would God have caused me to be born as a baby into a state of sin? Ah, He didn’t, that’s right. He gave us freewill and we all chose this path. You and I and Mrs Jones, we all chose original sin. Well, no, we didn’t. Adam and Eve (but mainly Eve, don’t forget) chose that for us and you remember how God isn’t happy just punishing the person responsible for the sin. As a gesture of His boundless love for us, He’s got to punish every succeeding generation, too. Now every single one of us is born with a big black mark on our souls which we can’t get rid of on our own. I mean, really; let’s be sensible! We live in God’s universe and He is our loving Father. Couldn’t I have been born into a state of Grace, doesn’t that sound more Divine to you? Couldn’t He at least have gotten me to neutral and let me work things out from there? Why does God continue to behave like the Devil?

Things just don’t add up and so to support these first lies, Christians start inventing more lies and more creeds and more doctrine until we’re all drowning in a sea of completely fabricated rules and dogma.

Jesus Christ was the Son of God

First of all, even though I say Jesus was the son of God, as you are probably aware, it’s not quite as simple as that. Jesus was begotten (not like a physical human) *from* God but was in fact, God Himself. In some indefinable and inexplicable (and obviously non-provable and nonsensical – it would hardly be Christianity if it could be proven!) way Jesus was actually both fully God and fully human. This is what the Church expects us to believe and I’ve only just scratched the surface of this complicated dogma that stubbornly resists common sense, no matter how we look at it.

I have read Christian authors who speak of the concept of the Holy Trinity with pride – alone among the world’s religions, Christianity promotes a three-fold concept of the Divine - as if its uniqueness is some kind of badge of merit or veracity. The fact that no other religion has developed such a complicated and inherently contradictory/paradoxical concept is not something that Christians should necessarily be proud of. Of course, in our age, paradox has become something of a badge of honour for anything religious or spiritual. Instead of something that doesn’t make sense being discarded as nonsense, it is venerated as somehow being ‘beyond reason’ or appealing to a ‘higher truth,’ whatever that means. I don’t feel it is an understatement to say that unless a religion actually includes something fundamentally paradoxical in its philosophical schema it won’t succeed. Ironically, before people will accept a religion it must be, by definition, rationally unacceptable. But I digress…

Unlike the Holy Spirit, this idea of Jesus being the Son of God and also God Himself (consubstantial, remember) has some meat on its bones allowing us to break it down and see what if it is worthy of our patronage.

What does Jesus have to say regarding his relationship to God? This should settle the matter once and for all… surely.

First of all, we have a big problem with the New Testament Jesus contradicting many of the things God says in the Old Testament, which, in Trinity-speak means Jesus/God is contradicting Himself. I’ve already pointed out some of these instances, such as the famous “eye for an eye” versus “turn the other cheek” or God’s harsh attitude towards lepers, sick people and menstruating women versus Jesus’ clearly more compassionate ideals. At least when Jesus was considered a separate entity to God, he could say something different from Him without actually contradicting himself. It was already a problem for Christians that Jesus and God were so diametrically opposed to each other but now that they are actually the same entity, it’s a total disaster, making a mockery of the pair of them.

Next, there are many places in the Gospels where Jesus speaks clearly of God as separate from him:

* Mark 13:32 “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”
* In three of the Gospels (Matt, Mark and Luke), when Jesus is on the cross he speaks to God. Luke 23:46 “Father, ‘*into Your hands I commit My spirit*.’” Matt 27:46 and Mark 15:34 “*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”*
* John 10:17 “My Father loves Me”
* Matt 10:33 “whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.”

But there is also the oft-quoted statement affirming the exact opposite:

* John 10:30 “I and *My* Father are one.”

So Jesus himself seems somewhat confused about the whole thing. These conflicting points of view are fundamentally irreconcilable. Either Jesus is God or he isn’t. But when you aren’t limiting yourself to facts or commonsense the possibilities are endless and so we end up with consubstantiation; he was both God and human (and Holy Spirit), fully, equally and at the same time.

Of course, this doctrine makes commentary on it somewhat awkward so from here on out I use the concepts, ‘Jesus as God’ and ‘Jesus as the son of God’ interchangeably.

So whatever Jesus was, God or just His son, are these our only options? What about the crazy idea that Jesus was just another apocalyptic teacher? What else can we say about Jesus? Obviously, Jesus’ alleged miracles and his fulfilment of various lines of prophecy are completely inadmissible as proof of his Divinity. This is a sensible, realistic discussion and as such I am banning the entrance of fantasy into the mix. If you want to start believing in dead people rising, blind people seeing and lame people walking (especially when these events happened two thousand years ago and weren’t documented until, um… no one knows when and by, um… no one knows who) you would be better off renting a good horror movie than reading this book. Curing death and walking on water are things that should require a hell of a lot of proof before we believe them. And by a ‘hell of a lot of proof,’ I mean more than a few stories in a book already riddled with inconsistencies and outlandish claims. Let’s leave the fairytales for the kids and continue with the adult discussion.

The primary historical evidence we have relating to Jesus comes from the gospels in the New Testament. What can we say about these?

Well, there is a majority (although not a consensus) view among scholars that tends to tentatively hold that the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) weren’t written until around 70AD (although, of course no one knows for sure and the debate is still raging (and will continue forever I expect) but some have estimated this date to be as early as 50AD. What’s more, it seems that Mark was the first and from the content of all four of them, it appears that the other three are based on Mark. This means that the others could have been written much later than this date. Now, general belief supposes that Jesus died around 30AD; a little bit of math reveals that there is a twenty to forty year gap between the death of Jesus and the emergence of the Gospels, at least Mark. Could this be right? Is this not immediately suspect?

Here’s the picture as we’re supposed to believe it. The son of God comes to Earth to teach us and inspires a whole bunch of people and then dies. Not one of the people whose lives were supposedly immensely changed by God coming to Earth thought to write anything about this God/man for twenty to forty years after his death. (This is at least partially suspicious because it is traditionally believed that Matthew and John were both eyewitnesses of Christ’s life). Let’s think about this for a second. I know that if the son of God came to me and taught me things, I would be frantically recording everything he says as soon as he says it. Why did these people wait for over twenty years to put quill to papyrus?

A Christian might argue that most people were illiterate at that time[[8]](#footnote-9) and documentation was less important than oral teachings. Nevertheless, the (supposed) fact is that the gospels *were* written and the authors attempted to accurately record the life of Jesus. If they were going to do this, wouldn’t it have made sense to get things down *before* twenty to forty years *after* the guy dies?

The problem is that even if we accept that these people didn’t recognise the importance of actually recording their experience/observations/stories heard at the time (hindsight is 20/20, and so on), twenty to forty years ago is quite a long time to have to think back to. Can you remember what you were doing twenty, thirty, forty years ago? Even if the authors actually witnessed the events they recorded, they could have been well into their fifties or sixties by the time they put them to paper. At that age, if I can recall events with so much clarity that I can recount actual conversations in detail, like the Gospels purport to do, I will consider myself to have done very well indeed. Can you quote verbatim things that people said to you twenty years ago? Can you even do the same for conversations you had last week?

This also begs the question we looked at above, why wait so long to get your ideas on paper? The longer you leave it, surely the less accurate it will be. Now, if I’m writing my memoirs, sure, I’ll wait a while, but for a text about the son of God; I’m going to get that out as soon as possible. It’s funny that the authors of the Gospels apparently didn’t share my enthusiasm but more than that it’s worrying, because as we all know, the further from the original date we get, the more outlandish and incredible a story becomes. I’m certain we all ‘remember’ more than a few relatively mediocre events in our lives that have been unintentionally embellished by the passage of time into spectacular moments where the spotlight was shining directly on us. Hey, it’s only human, and let’s not forget, that’s what we are talking about here… humans.

Perhaps the most interesting (although far from the most compelling) argument in favour of the idea that Jesus Christ is the son of God comes from that famous Christian apologist, CS Lewis. In one of his very interesting books, Lewis tells us that Jesus Christ appeared and started claiming that he was the son of God. He told people to follow him and talked about God as if he had a personal relationship with Him. Because of the things Jesus said and the things he did, Lewis rejects the notion that Jesus was merely a great moral teacher saying that if a mere man came along who acted and talked like this he would have to be either a lunatic (“on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg”), the Devil or exactly who he says he is.

Lewis concludes this ‘logical’ argument with the following statement, “... it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God.”

When I first read this, I was stunned that someone (especially someone as literate and intelligent as CS Lewis) could actually attempt to pass this off as a legitimate reason for believing Jesus was God. What really blew me away was when I read it again in a book written by a scientist, someone who supposedly relies on logic and interacts with the scientific method on a daily basis. Here are my thoughts on the issue.

I find it outrageous that Lewis could equate someone believing they are God, with someone believing they are an egg. What he is trying to say with this absurd analogy is that it’s *impossible* for someone to claim what Jesus claimed and be doing it because he or she was crazy. Unfortunately, I have difficulty believing this.

When I was in school, I had a friend whose father had been committed to a mental institution because he believed he was Jesus Christ. Today, I am certain that there are many, many clinically insane people in mental institutions who believe they are God or Jesus and don’t subscribe to the belief that they are also poached eggs. I also believe there are many such people who aren’t in mental institutions.

Secondly, is it obvious that the man who started a religion which would, several hundred years after his death, be responsible for forcing people, often under torture, to renounce their beliefs, for impeding the advance of science because it disagreed with Scripture, for destroying all temples and any sacred sites pertaining to ‘evil’ pagan practices, and would be directly responsible for the murders of God knows how many tens or hundreds of thousands of innocent people over the course of human history, was not a fiend? If I was going to speak frankly I would say that is exactly what I would expect the Devil to do. We are told the Devil will try and trick us. If the Devil was to masquerade as the son of God, wouldn’t that be the ultimate deception?

Thirdly, perhaps Jesus was simply a conman, a charlatan. Perhaps he spoke well for the times and was able to manipulate people in exactly the same way that cult leaders of our age convince their followers that they too are sons of God, or even God themselves! Make no mistake about it, this was not the first, nor was it the last time in history that someone has claimed to be God. There are probably no fewer than several hundred people on the planet at the time I’m writing this, who have scores of followers convinced of their divinity. And over half of these spiritual leaders probably believe it themselves! I myself know a person who swears that his ‘guru’ in Asia, can heal people. He even told me that people would gather by the hundreds just to touch his robe. And this was just a few years ago, not a couple of thousand. More or less believable? Is it such a stretch of the imagination to suppose that Jesus could have been like this guru? What real, solid evidence do we have to believe otherwise? If we’re honest with ourselves, none.

Having accepted all of the possibilities that Lewis rejects, we are left with one more. Perhaps Jesus was just a great moral teacher who built a small following and wandered around sharing his particular path to happiness. Despite Lewis, there is absolutely no reason to discount this option. Any of these solutions are infinitely more plausible than his being the son of God.

A couple more ideas for your consideration:

Isn’t it odd that Paul, a mere man, would do more for Christianity than Jesus ever did? Paul travelled to many different countries spreading the word of God, he built Churches, he gathered supporters, he was *the* force that truly organised and kicked off Christianity. By comparison, Jesus was little more than a wandering speaker who gathered together a few Apostles. Surely these descriptions should be the other way around.

Here’s another thought. If you were God, would you send down a single person to a single country and have him pass on your sacred message to a single group of people for just a decade or two? I doubt it. If God was truly about freewill for everyone he would have sent His son to everyone on the planet. And being God, this would be something He could have easily accomplished.

Still on the ‘if you were God’ theme, would you also allow the only semi-decent accounts of that person’s existence to be recorded in four Gospels written twenty to forty odd years after his death and incorporated into your book? Would you then allow the four Gospels to tell wildly conflicting stories about one of the most important events in the Christian faith, namely, the resurrection of Jesus? Something is suspicious here but Christians, exactly the people who should be the most concerned about these things, refuse to sit up and pay attention.

Along the lines of what I said earlier, the claim to be the son of God is an extraordinary one indeed and as such should require extraordinary evidence to back it up. I truly believe that we are not given anything even remotely resembling this level of evidence from the Bible.

Jesus Christ Died for our Sins

This tenet ties into phase three of the original sin initiative and maintains that Jesus Christ sacrificed himself as a way of redeeming humanity in the eyes of God. It’s the act that made it possible to buy a ticket into Heaven. All we have to do is believe in Jesus and we’re magically saved because we come under his umbrella of ‘sinlessness.’

Before we even begin to look at this myth I need to point something out to you. Just like original sin, neither God nor Jesus ever made any claims about this feature of Christianity. Jesus did say that his blood was being shed for many but he never specifically talks about his crucifixion somehow redeeming our terrible sins. Paul first develops this idea in the New Testament long after Jesus’ death. Suspicious already...

I must admit this notion has always been quite humorous to me. Think about what it says of God. God was so angry at us that He couldn’t find it in His heart to forgive us so His son (who is somehow in some complicated fashion actually the same as God… *and* the Holy Spirit) came to Earth, lived a perfect life and died so that God’s need for vengeance was satiated and He could allow humans into Heaven once more. The whole story makes a complete mockery of God. Even just a half-decent human being would be able to forgive someone for a transgression, especially if an eternity in either Heaven or Hell was at stake. But God is so bloodthirsty that someone had to pay the price to get Him to remit, and then God would only accept His son to be that one… who was actually Him anyway, so what was the point?

Christians overlook this obvious and inescapable implication of their doctrine. They always focus on the fact that Jesus was so wonderful to sacrifice himself so that through him we may be saved. They never stop to wonder why he had to sacrifice himself. God controls everything, if He deems it done then it is. And yet, He couldn’t see His way to forgiving us without someone being crucified, even if it was His son. We know that the God of the Christians is petty but do they really expect me to believe He is *this* petty?

In *Mere Christianity,* CS Lewis attempts to address the problem of why a loving God would demand such a payment, such a penalty, from anyone, much less His only son. The way he wriggles around this is a fascinating look at how human intelligence is capable of being employed in self-deception. Truly, we can convince ourselves of almost anything if we really want to.

First, he says that it was not a punishment in the police-court sense but, in Lewis’ own words, the more general sense of “footing the bill,” the way someone might help out a friend who gotten himself into trouble.

Next, he addresses the kind of trouble this ‘man’ has gotten himself into. To Lewis, this heinous crime is in the man behaving as if he belongs to himself. This man is not just an imperfect creature but a “rebel who must lay down his arms.” This process of surrender is called, repentance. This repentance is difficult, so difficult that only a truly good person could do it but the catch is that a truly good person wouldn’t need to do it. In other words, only a perfect person could repent perfectly, but a perfect person wouldn’t need to repent.

So, Lewis reasons that we need God’s help to surrender this terrible sinning nature of ours, but that act is something which God cannot do. God can only give to us things of his nature, but surrender and death (the death of this evil part of us) are nothing to do with God, so God cannot help.

And this is where Jesus comes along. Jesus is God made man, Divinity in the flesh, and as such is able to suffer, surrender and die, things which God in His true nature could never do. What’s more, this man/God is perfect and so he can carry out this act of repentance perfectly, which we can share in, thereby gaining absolution.

As a final kick in the crotch, Lewis insists that repentance is not something God demands of you before He takes you back, but is simply a description of what going back to God is like.

When I read this story I was struck by how contrived it sounded. It sounds just like what it is, a set of pseudo-reasoning logic designed for the sole purpose of justifying something that is on its own, completely ludicrous and without a sensible leg to stand on. But, I appreciate that you may not share my view and so we should look a little closer.

First, Lewis relies on showing that humans have committed a terrible sin. Just what is this sin? Thinking that we belong to ourselves. If you had not already been indoctrinated with the Christian notion that humans are useless, weak, sinning machines, then this notion would sound completely ridiculous. It requires that you believe you belong to someone else, God. Do you insist that your children belong to you? Would you take offence if they said they belong to themselves? Surely, it is every parent’s job to get their children to a point where they do belong to themselves, and I think we would all agree that parents who do not feel this way, have failed in their jobs as parents. Yet, we accept it in God. What kind of petty, insecure God is this to be more jealous and possessive than a typical human parent?

Then he says that in order to absolve ourselves of this terrible sin we must repent, but this act of repentance is so difficult that it cannot be achieved by a normal person. He even goes so far as to say that perfect repentance requires a perfect person. On what authority is he proclaiming this? Does it even make sense? He is basically saying that even people who want to apologise and give themselves to God, cannot. He presupposes that this magical act of forgiveness he calls repentance, requires something that no human has. This is pure human invention, pure rubbish.

So, God became human to repent perfectly (to Himself) on our behalf. Does this make sense? Even if it’s true that God became human, how does His perfect repentance transfer to me? If I owe someone a thousand dollars and my friend pays it for me am I then somehow trustworthy, honest, honourable? Have I learnt a lesson? Yes, I have. The lesson I’ve learnt is that if I screw up someone will always come and bail me out. Is this the lesson God wants to teach us?

And finally, Lewis knows that he needs to address the issue of why God needs this repentance in the first place. He does this in a terrible act of imagination and invention by claiming that God doesn’t demand it of us, it just describes the process of going back to God. This is an absolute insult to every thinking person’s intelligence. Does he really expect me to believe that God has no control over this? Surely God invented it! I mean, the last time I checked, He invented everything! If He didn’t invent this repentance process, who did? Since God must have made the process the way it is, then God is certainly demanding it before He can find it in His heart to forgive you.

To say that repentance merely describes a process is a blatant cop out. God is so angry at us that only blood can satisfy Him. The cold, hard fact of the matter is that Christians believe God created humans, spurned them for their sin and then offered them a way back into His good graces through the suffering and death of His son/Him. Another simple analogy serves to show the sheer stupidity of this claim. Imagine your child grows up and offends you in some way (let’s keep it as close to the Bible as we can), say, by trying to be like you. What would you demand from your child as repentance? Would you not stop until there was bloodshed to satisfy this outstanding ‘debt?’ Would you require a death? Of course you wouldn’t. Only a maniac would act in such a way and yet this is exactly how Christians are saying God acted. When the mind wants to believe something, nothing will stand in its way...

The Bible is Trustworthy and Therefore Accurate

I think I’ve adequately dealt with this myth already in the first part of this book.

Heaven and Hell Exist

This is another story that God never mentioned anything about in all of His dialogues. He makes many promises and even more threats when He’s around in the Old Testament, but an everlasting life after death in either Heaven or Hell is **never** one of them. Does anyone else think it strange that God would omit these extremely important concepts?

But doesn’t God talk of the Promised Land? Yes, he does but this was always a real place, a real country for His people to dwell in. God never alludes to it being more than this. It is the one and only carrot he uses to encourage the “stiff-necked” Israelites to worship Him.

Doesn’t He threaten Hell for those who disobey Him? No. He promises to wreak all manner of pain and terror... but only physical pain. As I have already mentioned He promises to visit “the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth *generations* of those who hate Me.” Why would He promise to come after the fourth generation of someone when He has all of Hell at His disposal? Is Hell not punishment enough? Unless it doesn’t exist at all...

As with all of these beliefs we need to ask ourselves what evidence we have that either of these places are real, and not surprisingly, the answer is… none. There can’t ever be evidence of them because to make it to either place, one needs to die which kind of limits one’s ability to comment on them. Yet another completely unconfirmed promise of Christianity.

So why are they there, then? Let’s look at what the concepts of Heaven and Hell do for Christianity. Heaven has two appealing lures. First, it is the ultimate reward for joining the faith. Think about it; an eternity of bliss and joy, the likes of which we can’t even imagine here on Earth. That’s a pretty sweet temptation. (Can anyone say seventy two dark eyed virgins?) Secondly, Heaven dispels the fear of death that I believe every sane human being has. Death is the ultimate unknown and even if you have never thought about it, I’m quite certain (and most psychologists are, as well) that it is your number one fear. But, fear not! You are no more than a single promise away from an eternity of hanging out with God (and/or seventy two dark eyed virgins, although what if you’re a woman…? Maybe you become one of the virgins. I guess Allah is male too).

Hell is the ultimate punishment and is another perfect example of how fear plays a crucial role in faith. Hell was designed to motivate people to join the Church by making them so fearful of the consequences that they couldn’t afford to take the chance it was wrong.[[9]](#footnote-10) The twin concepts of the Devil and Hell have arguably done more for religion than God or Heaven on their own ever could have. An eternity of pain and torture more extreme than you could ever imagine... that’s some powerful motivation, right there.

Both principles have worked extremely well. And don’t forget who first told us of them; the people who stood to benefit, Christians.

Anything that leads me to only one course of action and so unashamedly attempts to arouse my action through fear makes me extremely suspicious. I don’t like being forced into a decision for any reason but if that reason is fear it especially rankles me because it’s such an obvious form of manipulation and that is exactly how I feel when Christians say to me, “You don’t want to go to Hell, do you?”

I also don’t like being treated like a child when they ask, “Don’t you want to go to Heaven?” That kind of reasoning may have worked on me when I was about ten years old and Mum would say, “If you eat your vegetables you can have some dessert,” but it’s insulting when people try to ply that same kind of nonsense on me as an adult.

It’s funny how Christians have never thought to question these concepts. Why do I say that? Because they are both such outlandish ‘pie in the sky’ ideas. I mean, come on! Living in complete, Divine bliss with God forever, or an eternity of unimaginable suffering at the hands of the Devil? Not just a few years mind, but *forever*. If it wasn’t couched in a religion that is so pervasive in our culture, we would instantly dismiss it as total drivel.[[10]](#footnote-11)

I admit that both are very clever ploys and, like the reigning tag team champions of the (Western) religious world, they have worked astoundingly well for Christianity but I refuse to be manipulated by either the carrot or the stick. I am no donkey. I’ll take my chances. I see absolutely no reason to believe any of this nonsense but I see many hints that these concepts are fabricated ones invented solely to boost Christian membership.

As a bonus in this section I want you to think about this. As I’ve mentioned earlier, in Deuteronomy 32, God kills Moses before the Israelites cross over into the Promised Land. He makes it quite clear that it is a punishment and not a reward. It is also made clear in Deuteronomy 34 that Moses was only one hundred and twenty years old and “His eyes were not dim nor his natural vigor diminished.”

Now, if Moses got to go to Heaven then his death was hardly a punishment, but it would be a little severe if he was forced to go to Hell, considering how dedicated the poor bugger was to God.

What can we conclude from this? Simple. Moses died and went into the ground; neither up to a heavenly place nor down to a hellish one… because neither exist.

Jesus Christ will Come to Earth and Save His Followers

Judgement Day, the Day of Reckoning, Armageddon. That will be an interesting day, won’t it?

I don’t even know what to say about this, except that Christians are still waiting for this day as they have been for almost 2000 years. This is a lovely addition to the Christian doctrine because it fits right in with all of the other beliefs; it can never be proven, it motivates primarily through fear, it was never mentioned by God and it will always be something that will happen at a future date.

As far as I’m concerned this is just the last in a long list of fantastical promises and threats made by a religion to bolster its popularity and help the Church garner more power for itself. All I have to say about this is that I look forward to the day when Jesus comes back because I’ve got a few questions for him!

**Arguments for Christianity**

Okay, so where are we? We’ve dealt with the Bible. We haven’t totally disregarded it but we’ve taken it down from the pedestal it was perched on proclaiming itself as the holy, infallible, word of God and revealed it for what it is… and surprise, surprise, it turned out to be a book! We’ve also looked at what Christians believe and how reasonable those beliefs are including a reasonably detailed exposition of their God.

Let’s now look at some arguments which attempt to prove Christianity and see if these stack up to our rigorous, sensible approach.

Ontological Arguments

Ontological arguments are arguments that seek to prove the existence of God without relying on observations. They make the claim that the existence of God can be discerned through logic and reason alone… right up our alley, huh?

This kind of argument first appeared on the scene courtesy of medieval philosophers Avicenna and Anshelm. There are a few different versions of the ontological argument, Descartes and Leibniz have both used it, but they differ only in cosmetic ways. Before I give the basic outline of this argument I will just clarify a key term to help keep things condensed because, believe me, things are going to get a little delicate.

GCB = Greatest Conceivable Being (perfect in every sense and of which no greater being can be conceived)

Okay, now let’s move onto the argument itself:

1. You can imagine the GCB but are clear that it exists in your mind and not in reality. I.e. while you can conceive of the GCB you understand that it doesn’t exist in reality.
2. But the GCB *can* be conceived to exist in reality as well. We may not believe it exists but it is a feasible possibility.
3. But it is greater (more perfect) for a thing to exist in reality rather than just in the mind alone.
4. Therefore we are forced to admit that there is a conceivable being greater than the GCB (our supposedly ‘most perfect’ being)
5. But that is absurd.
6. Therefore the initial premise (1) that the GCB exists in your mind and not in reality is false. I.e. The GCB (which we happen to call God) *must* exist in reality.

This is a tricky argument to get your head around and as you are led through it you happily accept each of the premises until you get to the end and find yourself somehow painted into a corner. When I first heard this argument I felt that the wool was being pulled over my eyes but I couldn’t see how. It was like watching a magic trick; I knew it was an illusion but I couldn’t see how the magician did it. This was an indication to me that something fishy was going on and led me to dissect the argument from Every Conceivable Direction (ECD). Let me summarise my thoughts.

Initially, the argument was rejected by a man called Gaunilo, who used the same framework to create an ‘overload argument,’ by asking the reader to imagine the perfect island. Using the, ‘existence is more perfect than non-existence’ clause, he claimed that the perfect island must therefore exist. This can obviously be extended to all manner of creatures.

The problem with this objection is that the ontological argument refers to the GCB. An island, or unicorn, or anything, could never be *the* GCB. I.e. you could imagine something more perfect than an island or a unicorn (I.e. God). *The* GCB is not merely the greatest conceivable thing out of a certain *kind* of thing – it is thegreatest conceivable being out of *all* beings. This seems to me to solidly defend the ontological argument.

Let’s revise our plan of attack. Like I said earlier, we know something funky is going on, we just need to find out what it is. This is our first clue. If we take away the first step in the argument, the whole thing collapses. All you’re left with is a statement that the GCB can possibly exist in reality and it ends there.

This tells us that the entire sting of the argument comes in the comparison that takes place between steps 1 and 2 and which ultimately leads to the reductio ad absurdum conclusion[[11]](#footnote-12) in step 5. This is very important. If you read through the argument carefully (like several hundred times) you will notice that the initial conceivable being (not existing in reality) is compared with another conceivable being (still not necessarily existing in reality) and from just these two unreal entities (no more entities are introduced) a real entity is somehow concluded. How can that possibly be?

This is what I like to think of as a layered argument. There are several premises all working together in different directions to create a web of illusion that is extremely difficult to penetrate. These are, I believe, the key points that make up this web:

* The being which is imagined is by definition the most perfect being.
* Existence is supposed to be a part of perfection.
* The final conclusion that the initial premise is false.

Let’s examine these one by one and see if we can’t resolve the entire mess.

To start with, defining the GCB as the most perfect being (only in our mind, at first) sets that idea up for an easy semantic knockdown. Anything described as completely perfect is susceptible to logical attacks. Consider this very clever ‘proof’ that an omnipotent God can’t exist:

If God is omnipotent then can He make a stone so heavy that even He can’t lift it?

You can see the contradiction. If you answer yes, He can make the stone. Then you must concede that God can’t do something, i.e. lift the stone, and is therefore not omnipotent. If you say no, God can’t make the stone. Then you are forced to conclude He can’t be omnipotent. Catch 22.

Does this prove that an omnipotent God doesn’t exist? I don’t think so, but it shows quite nicely that words and reason can sometimes be used in clever ways to distort the truth.

In the ontological argument, the perfect GCB in our mind is shown to be false by means of a clever semantic ploy which arises in the form of our second point...

By including existence as an aspect of perfection, the argument successfully resolves that our ‘only mental GCB’ (with non-existence as a part of its attributes) cannot in fact be *the* GCB because there is another GCB (one with existence as a part of its attributes) which is greater. So, there turns out to be a GCB greater (more perfect, i.e. possessing existence) than the initially conceived GCB. Enter our third point:

Since the argument turns out to lead to an absurd conclusion, i.e. there is a greater GCB than the (supposedly great*est*) GCB in your mind (there can only be one GCB), it is concluded that the initial premise must have therefore been false. GCB (God) *cannot* exist only in the mind and not in reality, It (He) must exist in reality.

It is in this final phase that the true magic of the ontological argument comes in. It is here that the chasm between merely ‘conceivable’ and ‘real’ is bridged. Unfortunately, because the path to the conclusion is quite complicated, this magical change from talking about conceivable beings to concluding in a real being is often missed.

Having broken it down like this we can see that the argument only works if someone claims that they can conceive of the GCB in their mind but they maintain that it doesn’t exist in reality. This leads to the comparison and the ultimate reductio ad absurdum.

There are actually several ways to show that this is a flawed argument

If you ignore the first step, you successfully avoid the reductio ad absurdum and are left with a remarkably simple and outrageously ridiculous argument that actually comes closer to the core of the ontological argument and allows you see it without the frills. What it basically winds up saying is that one of the properties of the GCB is that it must exist, therefore it must exist. The GCB is pre-defined as the greatest and most perfect being imaginable and, since existence is (allegedly) more perfect than non-existence, one of its properties therefore must be, existence. This remarkable argument, without all of the distracting dialogue (the magician’s beautiful, scantily clad assistants), looks something like this:

1. The GCB is perfect.
2. Perfection includes existence.
3. Therefore the GCB (God) exists.

Less convincing without the frills, isn’t it? There are three fatal flaws immediately visible. First, if we are trying to conclude that the GCB exists we cannot infer the GCB in any of the premises. If you do, the argument becomes circular. The first premise assumes that the GCB is perfect, and of course, for something to be anything, it must also exist. So in trying to prove that the GCB exists we are assuming it does. Naughty, naughty.

Second, merely claiming that something is perfect need not make it so. The first assumption is totally unjustified in claiming that the GCB (even if we grant that it exists) is perfect. This premise is totally without foundation and needs to be proven itself before the argument has any merit.

Finally, we can challenge the notion that perfection includes existence and I will now devote a little time to explaining this.

Another place we can question the argument is in the third step which asserts that ‘perfection includes existence’ or ‘existence is more perfect than non-existence,’ in the words of the original argument. Is this true? I’m not so sure. I wouldn’t actually say that existence (or non-existence) has anything to do with perfection. I feel quite justified in saying that I can imagine the perfect apple, even though it may not exist in reality. Does its non-existence make it any less perfect? It would definitely be better if it did exist, but, if it did, I don’t think I would say that this fact completes its perfection in any way. It seems slightly counter-intuitive to say that I can’t imagine some perfect thing if it doesn’t actually exist in reality.

The great philosopher, Immanuel Kant, analysed this particular property of ontological arguments as early as the 18th century in his (outstandingly difficult to read) *Critique of Pure Reason*. He concluded that existence (being) is not a real predicate. To know whether a thing exists or not adds nothing to our knowledge about the thing. He stated that a real proposition contains two concepts, the latter (predicate) serving to add information to the former (subject). If we say *God is omnipotent* then we are adding the concept of *omnipotence* to the concept of *God*. But if we merely say that God exists we are just saying *God is*. This does not add any new predicates to the concept of God. It merely posits the subject in itself along with all its *real* predicates (omnipotence, power, etc).

As a simple test of this doctrine, Kant observes that if we reject the predicate but not the subject a contradiction arises but if we reject both the subject and the predicates there is no contradiction because there is nothing left. Kant uses a triangle as his example. To posit a triangle but reject its three angles is contradictory but to reject the triangle itself (its being, its ‘*isness*’), which necessarily includes all its predicates, there is no longer a contradiction because there is no triangle anymore.

Since a thing’s existence adds no information to our concept of it, it is not a predicate and it cannot serve to make a thing more ‘perfect.’

We can also cut the argument off before it gets to the absurd conclusion at step 5. After steps 2 and 3 where it was ‘proven’ that my initial GCB (which didn’t exist in reality) wasn’t actually *the* GCB, doesn’t it make more sense to simply correct my first incorrect assumption? It is much more logical to acknowledge that the GCB as I imagined at the beginning was not actually *the* GCB and replace my imagined being with the being in step 2, which exists in reality. Don’t forget this is all only in my imagination though. We aren’t actually saying anything about true reality here. How can we? Steps 1 and 2 are all about the greatest *conceivable* being. This results in me *imagining* a GCB which exists but of course, whether it *actually* does or not is still undetermined. Imagining that a thing exists doesn’t necessarily make it so, does it? (I’m imagining my perfect bank account contains a perfect ten million dollars right now, just in case…!).

Note that I said this process, revising the initial GCB to the ‘new’ GCB in step 2, is *more* logical than the way the ontological argument handles the situation. This is not quite true. My process is actually the *only* logical method. It simply doesn’t make sense to do as the ontological argument does; i.e. conclude the whole thing is absurd and then simply reverse the first premise (from GCB existing in the mind but not in reality to all of a sudden existing in reality) as a means of correcting it.

Why not? To see this we need to step back a bit and look at the big picture. First of all, going through the whole absurd route is a whole lot more complicated than just revising the opening position. Second of all, look at the final conclusion. The GCB *must* exist in reality. This is complete madness. As I said at the beginning of this section, you cannot postulate two imaginary beings and then somehow come to the conclusion that one of them exists. If the argument is followed through logically and sensibly we discover that the GCB is imagined as a real being, but obviously, as I’ve already made quite clear, this cannot prove anything about reality itself.

The reason that the ontological argument goes through the reductio ad absurdum route is because in doing so it is able to declare the first premise false and reverse it, thereby creating a real being out of thin air. That is the whole magic to the ontological argument. It uses a process which looks to be logical on the outside but when you look at it closely, the true, highly illogical path through the fluff can be discerned. Ultimately, the ontological argument is a clever piece of thinking… but that’s all it is.

The Cosmological Argument

The cosmological argument is basically an argument for God from cause. It goes something like this:

1. Every finite and contingent thing (a thing dependent on something else for its existence) has a cause
2. Nothing finite and contingent can cause itself
3. An infinite regression of causes is impossible
4. Therefore a First Cause must exist and this First Cause must not be contingent, i.e. it must be Necessary (not relying on anything else for its existence); this we call God

(Aristotle’s Prime Mover argument is another version of the cosmological argument)

It’s a good argument and is logically consistent but the problem lies in the first premise. I accept that everything finite and contingent must have a cause but I disagree that everything we see in the Universe *is* finite and contingent. Sure, when I look at a piece of paper or my cell phone I think they are definitely both finite and contingent. I mean, they aren’t going to last forever and they certainly don’t *need* to exist. I can easily imagine them not existing so they aren’t Necessary. But this is only looking at things in a gross, clumsy way, where a cell phone is a cell phone.

Fortunately, we live in an age where enough science is known that we can say with a fair degree of certainty that a cell phone is not in fact just a cell phone. Rather, a cell phone is a collection of unimaginably tiny particles bound together in a marvellous way allowing this collection of particles to function as a cell phone for some time. The length of time that my cell phone exists may be little more than fifty years (depending on how soon I hurl it out my window in a fit of rage or it becomes obsolete) but the length of time that those particles exist is considerably longer, apparently infinite.[[12]](#footnote-13) What is actually finite is the length of time that the particles will bind together in the form of a cell phone. Long after the cell phone has disappeared the individual particles that made it up will still be in existence floating around in some other form.

When you consider the Universe, not as being made up of people and cars and cell phones but as a dance of elementary particles it loses its “finite and contingent” look. There is nothing inherently finite or contingent about a particle. What this means is that there is now no need to postulate a Necessary Being beyond the particles that make up the Universe. I want you to stop and think about what this means for a second, because it is a simple idea, but a very powerful one.

The cosmological argument basically says that something must have existed “first” and this “first thing” must have existed forever. In the parlance of the ontological argument, you could say that this ‘primary thing’ has eternal existence as one of its characteristics. Now, this eternal thing could be God... but there is nothing contradictory about postulating that it is actually just the collection of all of the elementary particles in the Universe. Perhaps it is these particles that are Necessary, perhaps it is these particles which may conceivably have existed forever and which may never fade from existence. If something has to be Necessary, why look any further than the building blocks of nature (which we know for certain exist, because we are here and so is my cell phone) and start positing a purely imaginative Being (which we have absolutely no direct evidence for)? An eternal God *could* have created all of the elementary particles or the elementary particles could be eternal themselves. Which one is correct? Well, we can’t necessarily know for certain, but we can look at the probabilities.

We already have some indirect, but nevertheless strong, evidence for one of these possibilities in the form of the law of conservation of energy, which says that the total amount of energy in a closed system remains constant. This means that energy (which also comes in the form of mass) can never be added to or taken away from a system. There is nothing you can do to either create or destroy energy/mass. You can change its form, by say, assembling it into a cell phone, or by burning it, but you can never actually increase or decrease the total energy contained in the universe. This is about as perfect a definition of eternal as I can think of.

Sadly, we have absolutely no evidence for the existence of the alternative. God has done absolutely nothing to reveal or even hint at the fact that He exists. If you are tempted here to say something like, “Then how did the universe get created?” then please take a close look at the section after the next, “*What caused the Big Bang…*”

The bottom line of this is that the cosmological argument demands something eternal and we found something eternal. It just wasn’t God. It was nothing more than the elementary particles that are all around us, in our desks, our pencils, the air and even our bodies. The story doesn’t need to be any more complicated than this and the more complicated a story gets the further from truth it tends to drift. William Occam said it best, “entities must not be multiplied beyond necessity.” Thanks, William.

There are also two more problems with the cosmological argument which are best highlighted by rephrasing the initial argument:

1. Everything that begins to exist has a cause.
2. The universe began to exist.
3. Therefore, the universe has a cause. This we call God.

Now here you can see that the ‘universe’ in the second premise is being included in the ‘everything that begins to exist’ of the first premise. I want you to think about that for a second. Is it right? I believe this is an error. The problem is that the universe is **not** just another member of the set, *everything that begins to exist*. The universe **is**, by definition, everything.

This may not seem like such a bad thing but if you accept my argument and follow the logic through you lose the syllogism (the ‘therefore’) and are just left with a bunch of premises strung together in remarkably non-compelling fashion:

1. The universe began to exist
2. *And* the universe had a cause
3. *And* this we call God

The second problem (returning to the first premise in my first restatement of the argument) is that for the argument to avoid circularity there must be a non-null set of entities which don’t begin to exist and which must be possible, *other than God*.

The first premise holds that “everything which begins to exist has a cause.” If we assume that everything in the universe began to exist and indeed had a cause and call this collection of things set A, then we must ask ourselves what other possible sets could there be? There can only be one, a set including things which don’t begin to exist and therefore don’t have a cause, let us call this set B.

The problem is that there is only one entity which can possibly be included in set B… God. Why is this a problem? Because, if the set can contain only one entity then it is merely a synonym for that entity and set B (the set of things which don’t begin to exist and don’t have a cause) just becomes God.

If we then revisit the first premise, “everything which begins to exist has a cause” we can see that this is the same as saying, “everything except God has a cause.” Since this is equivalent to the conclusion, the argument has been shown to be circular and is therefore meaningless.

The Argument From Design

*The Watchmaker Argument*

This argument was made famous by William Paley in 1802 and basically goes something like this; imagine you are walking along the beach and come across a watch in the sand. You reach down, pick it up and, taking the back off, marvel at the machinery inside. Paley says you would automatically assume the watch was the product of some intelligent design and not a mere random occurrence that formed naturally. He feels that the watch is evidence of a watchmaker, even though the watchmaker may be currently absent. By analogy he goes on to say that the universe around us and all things in it are infinitely more complex than a watch and therefore prove that a designer, whom we call God, exists. Nicely done, William.

The watchmaker argument is a classic of its kind and various versions of this have been adopted by contemporary Christians lending strength to the Creationist movement, which has since changed its name in an attempt to sound more credible, to the Intelligent Design movement. The basic argument rests on the fact that things observable in nature, the movement of the planets, the human body, etc, seem too ordered to have occurred by random and the analogy of a watch serves to reinforce the point.

It is a nice argument and if you think about it, it seems quite reasonable but before we go running off to the nearest Church we first need to ask ourselves if the analogy is a fair one. Be careful, the question is *not,* ‘can you compare a watch to the Universe’ but, ‘can you compare the *formation* of a watch to the *formation* of a Universe?’ And I don’t think you can. Let me tell you why.

A watch is made up of individual components that would not, if left to themselves, form into a watch. That much is clear. If I throw a few cogs, a couple of hands and a bunch of metal on the ground, those components are never going to collect themselves together and form a watch, no matter how long I wait.

Now, if I throw a bunch of elementary particles on the ground, and by ‘bunch’ I mean the number of particles in the Universe, what would happen? I suspect the results may be quite different. I don’t find it implausible to suggest that over time various groups of these particles might ‘clump’ together through various intrinsic electromagnetic or gravitational forces[[13]](#footnote-14) and gradually develop a stronger influence that pulls other groups together until eventually we have a collection of molecules arranging themselves into something resembling matter. This is a story familiar to people all over the world and it all started with something called the Big Bang.[[14]](#footnote-15)

I think it is astonishingly unfair to use a watch as an analogy for the universe, or a human being or anything that occurs in nature, simply because a watch does not occur in nature. Machinery does not collect itself together so that it operates as a ‘watch’ or a ‘television’ which are clearly less complex objects than a human eye, for example. Why? Because there is no ‘machinery force’ occurring in nature which governs components and encourages them to join together and form bonds until a working machine occurs. However, there are forces that govern more basic objects in nature. We call these forces gravity, electromagnetism and the strong and weak nuclear forces. These four forces don’t just encourage, they compel atoms and molecules to come together and engage in various chemical processes, which result, eventually, however improbably, in a planet or even a human eye.

How does a watch form? A watch requires an intelligent being to arrange specific components in specific ways before it can manifest. How does an intelligent being form? Well, intelligent beings are a part of nature (to which category a watch definitely does not belong) and are both subject to and capable of biological and chemical growth and change. We know that such transformations frequently occur in nature and what’s more, we understand quite a lot about the rules and interactions which govern those transformations.

Therefore, comparing machinery to nature is ridiculous. Acts of nature are all governed by laws and chemical processes we have witnessed many times and learnt a lot about in the last couple of hundred years. Are these processes amazing? Absolutely! Do we completely understand them? Absolutely not! But that doesn’t mean some mysterious God is pulling the strings from behind some curtain in a castle in Oz.

Let me just bring it back and tie it all up. Paley compares the formation of a machine to the formation of the universe. He feels that if something as relatively uncomplicated as a watch requires a designer then something as complicated as the universe must also require a designer. I reject this hypothesis on the grounds that the formation of machinery does not occur in nature and is not governed by any naturally occurring forces or processes whereas the organisation of elementary particles, the building blocks of nature, is governed by extremely well-understood and well-defined laws and processes. The analogy is unfair and therefore completely void.

*Problems with the Design Arguments in General*

All forms of the design argument ask us to look at the universe or nature or a single part thereof and marvel at how intricate, complex and apparently designed it is. But there are many problems with assuming design by a perfect Being.

1. Something like 99.8% of all species that ever existed on Earth have gone extinct.
2. In about 3 billion years the Milky Way and Andromeda galaxies will collide and if that doesn’t disrupt our little corner in space, our sun will die in about 5 billion years ending for certain any life unfortunate enough to be around on Earth at that time.
3. The human body is, although miraculous, of course far from perfectly designed. The appendix is a completely useless appendage that can only possibly cause harm, our knees and backs easily wear out bringing daily pain to many people and even our genetic sequences themselves are full of useless “junk DNA.” The human eye which used to be the keystone for design proponents has been shown to be quite feasibly produced by natural evolution and we can even see eyes at various stages of development in nature. And let’s not forget how many people are need glasses for their ‘perfectly designed’ eyes.
4. Postulating a complex designer (God) does not and *can*not explain complexity. The problem with this is that you also need to account for the complexity of the designer. To sweep this objection under the carpet by claiming that God was always complex is (hopefully obviously) meaningless and empty.

What Caused the Big Bang and What Made the Four Forces in Physics as they are?

It’s time to address this question because it’s bound to come up and, we have in fact, already touched on it. Both of these issues were raised in the Watchmaker Analogy. Earlier, I also talked about a cell phone being “a collection of unimaginably tiny particles bound together in some marvellous way.” Christians like to point to things like these and infer God from the gaps in science.

It’s true that no cosmologist knows what caused the Big Bang or even understands what happened the moment it started. They are fairly confident of how things progressed since that time, from approximately 10-43 seconds after the moment of creation, but the actual ‘bang’ itself remains something of a mystery. Likewise, even if we were able to completely represent the forces of nature in a single, elegant equation that gave us remarkable power over our universe, we would quite possibly still be at a loss to explain *why* the forces exist and *why* they are the way they are.

“Aha!” Christians shout triumphantly. “Science can’t explain everything! The missing piece must be God!” Hold up for just a second. Let’s take a closer look at this and let’s start with our collective history.

What do almost, if not all ancient cultures have in common? They all had some kind of deity(s) that they worshipped. Let’s quickly look at a handful of them.

Egypt – Ra, the sun-God, travelled across the sky in his ‘sun-boat” during the day. This explains the sun’s movement. He also created everything on land, sky and water. This explains existence.

Aztecs – Chiconahui was a domestic fertility goddess. They needed her because they didn’t understand the biology behind procreation.

Babylonia - Anu, a God, created the four winds. Obviously the ancient Babylonians didn’t know what really caused the winds.

Rome – Jupiter was the God of sky, lightning and thunder, which fortunately explained what was going on during those terrifying thunderstorms that no doubt rattled a few people.

Now, you may notice that these Gods/Goddesses all have something in common. They all explain some mystery that the culture at that time and with their current scientific knowledge was unable to explain. It was a classic “god of the gaps” scenario. With the benefit of a couple of thousand years of scientific achievements we look back on these cultures now and recognise their religion for what it was. Maybe we think how primitive they were and wonder what it was like to live in such a society where Gods of nature and biology were worshipped... and then we go to church and pray to our God who we think explains the Universe. It’s quite humorous, is it not?

Christians haven’t learnt anything from these cultures. They go on making the same mistakes our ancestors did. They laugh at science’s inability to explain these problems and smugly claim that that means God did it. The obvious problem with that kind of thinking is the, “God did it” explanation is not actually an explanation at all, but rather *the absence of an explanation*. This is important so let me repeat it. To claim that God did something, completely fails to explain anything at all.

When someone tells you that, “God did it” or “It was God’s will” what they really mean is, “I have no %$@#ing idea!” Mysteries have always been a refuge for God. Do you know that the Aztecs used to make human sacrifices to appease their Gods in an attempt to favourably influence the harvest or the weather or various other situations we now recognise as occurring naturally, completely without reference to a God(s)? Why would a culture do this? Simple. Ignorance. They didn’t understand why some harvests were good and some bad or how the weather changed, so in a way that seems decidedly human, they assumed that various Gods were controlling things. Today, we don’t know what caused the Big Bang or why the forces exist as they do with the properties they have and so some people assume that God was/is behind it.

Do you notice how similar those last two statements I made are? They are virtually identical. Neither offers any kind of reasoning or explanation, but what characterises both of them is the *lack* of an explanation. We don’t know, therefore it must be because... This is obviously a nonsensical statement. Any conclusion which follows this statement carries absolutely no weight at all. How can ignorance and unknowing lead to a conclusion about the reason for something? It can’t.

Here’s something else. Scientists are working at finding explanations to lift the veil of ignorance while Christians sit back with absolutely no hypothesis at all and believe that they have the answers to the deepest questions in the Universe; “God did it.” Religion, when taken too seriously, is the most arrogant form of institution humanity has ever created. It offers no hypotheses, no theories and no evidence for anything, yet they laugh at science and scientists and take joy in pulling apart their theories. Scientists might pull apart Christianity’s theories too… if it had any.

Science may not be able to explain the two questions that head up this section but they’re sure trying, and let’s face it… religion isn’t offering any sensible alternatives. “God did it” is about as effective as me claiming my watch keeps bears away. “I don’t believe it,” you say; to which I reply, “Take a look around. You don’t see any bears, do you?” Impossible to prove wrong but clearly falling well short of anything even resembling convincing.

This applies equally well to the ‘consciousness’ claim that a lot of Christians make. “Science hasn’t adequately explained consciousness,” they smugly claim... but neither has religion. One Christian once claimed this exact thing to me; he said he believed in religion because science hasn’t yet explained consciousness. Isn’t it funny how we don’t believe in religion because we think it’s correct but because its opposite, science,[[15]](#footnote-16) isn’t even incorrect, just incomplete. He even used the word ‘yet,’ sensibly implying that science may very well one day explain it. As I sit here writing this book and listening to music using machines that would have been inconceivable to people just seventy years ago, I can’t help but think he was correct in that estimation.

How can incompleteness, possibly, ever recommend a belief in an opposite notion, especially when that opposite notion doesn’t even offer an explanation!? Oh, I’m sorry, God breathed consciousness into Adam in the Garden of Eden. We know this because someone, sometime, somewhere (we don’t know who, when or where) wrote about it in a book. How could I have been so stupid? If you’ll excuse me, I now have to go down to my garden and look for fairies and sprites while watching out for UFO’s.

Science used to be unable to explain the motion of the sun and the planets too, (to be fair this was before science was properly born) do you remember what Christians claimed? The claimed that God kept the heavenly bodies spinning around the earth. What did they base this belief on? That same book written in an unknown place by unknown authors, which told us that God created the universe for us and we were His special creation, the centre of His spectacular universe.

Consciousness, the Big Bang and the fundamental forces of nature. These represent some of the greatest mysteries of our day. Is it any wonder that religion takes refuge in these bastions? These are truly the front lines where science meets religion head on. On this battlefield, the main difference between the two factions is that scientists are actively searching for answers and may realistically one day find them while Christians sitting in their Ivory Towers will forever remain as ignorant as they were 2000 years ago. Don’t forget that.

*The Natural Law Argument*

I’d also like to briefly mention the natural law argument at this point because it is related to what we have just discussed. The natural law argument looks to nature and identifies the laws that scientists themselves have discovered, the law of gravity, speed of light, the rate of decay of an atom of uranium, whatever, there are many of them. Well, it postulates, laws must have a lawmaker, and it is this that we call God.

This is very easy to dispatch of. There is an enormous difference between natural and human laws. Believers may point to the open road speed limit and (correctly) conclude that it would not exist if there weren’t any humans (i.e. lawmakers) to have created it. This kind of law is called ‘prescriptive.’ It prescribes certain actions. It outlines which actions are permitted and which are not.

The laws that we identify in the universe, however, are not prescriptive, they are ‘descriptive.’ They merely describe what we have observed. Natural laws don’t need any lawmaker because they aren’t really ‘laws’ at all. They are rather, mathematical descriptions of what happens in our universe.

Allow me to explain with an example. We observe that nothing can travel faster than the speed of light, around 300,000km/sec, so we call it a law of nature, a law which nothing can violate. It is the terminology that is confusing because it makes us think that there must be a big guy somewhere who sat down one day and thought, “Hmmm, how fast should I make the cosmic speed limit? 200,000km/sec? That’s a bit slow. 400,000km/sec? Too many accidents. I know! 300,000km/sec.”

Of course, the speed of light is not really a ‘law,’ it is just a limit we have discovered regarding speed in the universe. The argument that a law needs a lawmaker is logically sound, but only for prescriptive laws. Descriptive laws, as I keep saying ad nauseum, aren’t laws as we typically define them and therefore cannot be used in this argument. Substituting the more correct term ‘description’ for ‘law’ in the argument gives us; every description of how objects interact in the universe needs a lawmaker… Clearly nonsense.

A key difference between prescriptive and descriptive laws which you may use as a litmus test, as it were, is that descriptive laws describe occurrences for which there can be no exceptions. Not just that there *are* no exceptions, there *cannot be* any exceptions in our universe as we understand it.

The prescriptive law forbidding first degree murder (one I agree with, by the way, despite not believing in God! A mystery that Christians can’t seem to fathom), while being a law, can nevertheless be broken. If I really want to, I *can* go out and kill someone. Nothing actually physically prevents me from doing so.

Now, we also call gravity a law, but have you ever seen anything break that? Sure, we can overcome it by providing a greater thrust in the opposite direction but the law of gravitation that says a mass of size M exerts an attractive force on an object O which diminishes at a rate inversely proportional to the square of the distance separating the two bodies, is 100% unbreakable according to our understanding of physics. If we ever find something that doesn’t conform to this law then it is our law that is inadequate and we will not blame the innocent object flouting our understanding of gravity.

Speaking of that, another litmus test between descriptive and prescriptive laws is to see if we can apportion blame for the breaking of a law. Would we (or God) sit there tsking, tsking a neutrino if we ever observe one travelling faster than the speed of light? Of course not. We (or God) would just go back to the drawing board and make the law (read ‘description’ here) fit with the observation.

On the other hand if we (or God) ever observed a delinquent driving at 190kph we would hardly be tempted to revise our speed laws to accommodate such a phenomena. We might revise our punishments for the breaking of those laws but we would not be in any confusion over whether it was the law or the offending party that was at fault.

The Universe is so Perfectly Fine-Tuned for Us that Something Must Have Designed It!

This argument comes directly from attempting to explain the anthropic principle. The anthropic principle basically states that the conditions of the universe are the way they are because if they weren’t, there wouldn’t be anyone here to observe them (life would be impossible). In attempting to defend this principle some people assert that certain quantities and values in our physical universe are so perfect for human life that they could not have occurred randomly. The people who hold this view, point to various figures and percentages saying things like, “If the mass of neutrinos were 5 x 10-34 instead of 5 x 10-35 kg, the additional gravitational mass would result in a contracting rather than an expanding universe.” There are many similar statistics that can be quoted in this vein ‘proving’ that if things had been slightly different, some numbers or quantities had been just a fraction greater or less than they are, we wouldn’t be here to observe them. Surely this degree of precision indicates some intelligence behind the universe?

First off, I would like to say that I really dislike the way people, Christians are guilty of this but even more so are new age thinkers, take modern scientific discoveries in ground-breaking research and with their virtually zero scientific knowledge attempt to draw some wild conclusions from them which, surprise, surprise, support their religion or spiritual belief. Science has been proving religion wrong ever since its inception and it will continue to do so for as long as religion tries to defend itself by making scientific claims. (Like the earth is the centre of the universe – remember that one? Big mistake guys!)

Before we get back to the point, I would like to point out that I do realise this appears to be violating the key point I made at the outset that this book would be looking at Christianity without the need for a doctorate in physics (or any subject for that matter), but this is an important point in favour of Christianity and so I feel obliged to mention it. Rest assured, I will attempt to analyse it only in laymans terms (being a layman myself!) and of course I will be relying heavily on our hallowed analytical tool, commonsense.

Yes, the universe is a remarkable place and it is full of incredible precisions (things that must have happened for us to be here), we need look no further than our own bodies to see this, but our knowledge of this subject is in some ways, still in its infancy and Christianity must be very careful that they don’t repeat the mistakes of their forefathers.

If you recall, fifteen hundred odd years ago the Church pounced on some of the ideas from a man who had provided much of the intellectual and philosophical impetus prior to the time, Plato, and deemed them to be a perfect reflection of Church doctrine. We all know how that story ended... with the Church being dragged kicking and screaming into the scientific age.

This fine-tuning nonsense is another example of religion attempting to capitalise on the latest ideas of the time and using them to support their own cause. The fact is, the advances in theoretical and experimental physics are currently bounding ahead at a rate faster than we really know what to make of them. Let’s not forget that it’s barely been a century since we confirmed the existence of the atom and began to probe its interior.

Our scientists may have reached a point where they are able to state that if the mass of the neutrino was 5 x 10-34 instead of 5 x 10-35 kg, life wouldn’t have been able to develop, but figures like these really don’t prove anything, and they certainly fall a long way short of proving that the God of the Christians created the universe.

It is quite possible, for instance, that the mass of the neutrino was fixed by some other variable, which was in turn fixed by another set of variables, fixed by another and so on back to a single variable way back when the universe was just forming, whose state may or may not have needed to be tuned to a high precision for the unfolding of our universe to have taken place. In this scenario, the universe may have had no choice but to evolve the way it has. We just don’t know. But that is at least as feasible as the idea that a Creator tinkered with the universe to make it the way it is.

Another possibility is that our universe may not be the only one. Perhaps there are millions of other universes out there (there are theories in physics like this, one even crazier than this proposes that an infinite number of universes are being created all the time!) in which there is no life and the physics of those universes completely prohibit life (maybe the mass of the neutron is 5 x 10-34kg). As long as we’re considering things like infinite, omnipotent Beings outside of space and time, things like other universes aren’t so far-fetched.

How about this? Our universe is the only one in which life like ours can evolve but what if it is possible for life to evolve in *any* universe, regardless of the physical parameters? Some key features might necessarily have to be different but perhaps organic life always finds a way in the organic universes that spring up, even if it has to be composed of anti-matter rather than matter. Does life even need to be organic…?

The bottom line is that, yes, there are certain values in physics that must be the way they are for life as we know it to have evolved, but this is far from conclusive evidence for God and struggles to even classify as an indicator of God. As I said before, understanding in these areas is still in its infancy and there is no need yet to rush off and become a born again Christian in response to this apparent ‘fine-tuning.’

There is also another closely-related argument to this one which I would like to look at while we are here. This more localised one says that our planet Earth is too miraculously fine-tuned for humans, to have evolved by chance. People who subscribe to this, say that things like, the air we breathe and the atmosphere which shelter us and allows us to thrive, are just too perfectly suited to human life to be the result of chance.

I want to take a slightly different tack with this argument. Let’s jump right into it and take a look at just how miraculously things have been fine-tuned for us humans.

We live on a planet surrounded by the almost limitless, empty vacuum of space which is decidedly inhospitable to us. If we climb to certain heights on some of our own mountains the air is so thin that we can’t breathe it, and we can’t survive going too far beneath the ground either. Approximately 75% of this miraculously perfectly-tuned planet, given to us by our loving Creator, is covered by water in which we cannot live because we need to breathe air. But wait! There’s more. Even on the remaining 25% there are certain areas we cannot comfortably inhabit because our bodies are so dependent on a temperate climate and so, not many of us live in the desert or at the poles. So, where are we? Out of the entire universe, we blessed humans are confined to a narrow vertical band around less than 25% of the surface of a single, lonely planet. How does that sound? Did God still create this universe for us?

Now, the die-hard Christian may desperately cling to a strand here and retreat to the opposite pole of the issue claiming that it is even more of a miracle that humans can survive against all the odds in this decidedly inhospitable universe. Surely there was some kind of divine intervention to enable this. This is easy to disregard in a way that also works with the fine-tuning argument.

The problem with all of this kind of thinking is that it looks at the results after the fact. It takes a result *after* the fact and then tries to make it special in some way. It is like me rolling a million sided die (it’s a big die) and let’s say I roll a 100. I could then claim, “Oh, my God! It’s a miracle! The chances of me rolling 100 were only one in a million! God must be looking out for me!” but we can all see the flawed logic in that, right? Unless I predicted what I was going to roll *before* I rolled the die it hardly constitutes a miracle.

To make this even more insane, imagine I rolled the die once and got a 3, then rolled it again and got a 72,592, and I kept rolling it until I got 100. Would you be amazed that I eventually got it? Of course not. Now, if I had said that I was going to roll the die once and only once *and* that I was going to roll 100, all *before* I rolled the die and then I actually did it, that would have been amazing, right? (You might even call me a God if I did that!)

Bringing the whole thing back to our lonely planet and fine-tuned universe, let’s compare my die analogy and see if it stacks up. Imagine a planet hospitable to life (even one barely so, like our Earth) in a universe where the laws of physics have fortuitously arrived at values that enable matter, both inorganic and organic, to flourish. This outcome is a roll of exactly 100. So, we can be certain that 100 showed up on the die at least once, the evidence is right here underneath my feet as I write this. But, Christians immediately make the first mistake that I pointed at above and claim after the fact that, “Oh, my God! God did it! He created a planet suitable for human life! It’s a miracle!” Well, even though the odds may have been a million to one it’s not really evidence of a miracle unless someone predicted it beforehand.

And the even more important and damning point is in the second part of my analogy where we have to ask how many rolls did it take to hit 100? Have you counted the number of stars in the universe recently? No? Me neither. Unfortunately for Christians, even conservative estimates range in the billions. How many of those stars have planetary systems like our own? Again, no one knows, but at the time of writing, scientists have detected evidence of more than one hundred extra solar-system planets. It’s not hard to imagine that there are probably a lot more than that out there too, right?

Even in our own planetary system, there are eight planets. That’s eight chances for a planet suitable for life to form. The universe is hardly stingy with its resources (just a single glance at the night sky and if you really want your mind blown, a peek at the Hubble deep field image should convince you of that) so should we really be surprised that in all the vastness of space, a planet formed that was capable of supporting an interesting animal we have come to know and love, humans.

If there was only one star in the universe (our sun) and only one planet in orbit around it (our Earth) then I might be more convinced by this argument but since that is obviously far from the truth, this argument must go the way of all the others we’ve encountered so far… down the toilet.

Of course there is also the criticism that plagues almost all arguments for the existence of God. If the universe was fine-tuned, who fine-tuned the fine-tuner? “But God doesn’t need a fine-tuner!” Unfortunately, just saying it hardly makes it so, does it?

Just Look at How Perfect Life Is!

This argument is often brought up by new-age folk also. It basically goes something like this; in a calm, quiet moment, perhaps while viewing a majestic sunset, the protagonist looks around him or herself and feels a sense of serenity. Suddenly, their belief springs to life before their eyes and if the person is a new-age thinker, they feel connected to everything in the cosmos and that everything is perfect. If the person is a Christian they feel that God exists and created everything in His perfect image and likeness. Some of these people may call this a life-changing experience and may hold it up in their minds as a moment of revelation. Later, they claim that even though life seems turbulent at times, there is perfection in the process.

Let’s look at just how perfect life is.

Tell the baby, who has wronged no one, but is born with any one of a vast number of defects, abnormalities or disabilities that currently afflict an incredibly high number of people, how perfect life is. How about the honest, church-going, God-fearing person who contracts a terrible disease and suffers for a prolonged period of time before finally dying? How about the innocent woman who was just raped? What about the child beaten and tormented by his or her parents throughout his or her whole childhood? Do these people think life is perfect and God is looking after them? Were they all sinners in some way, even though they may not have realised it?

If good things only happened to good people (Christians) and bad things only happened to bad people (sinning atheists), then this argument would carry some weight. “Look how perfect life is for me!” But there are many non-Christians out there who are happy and there are many Christians who are in terrible pain or suffering. Do you think there’s more chance of a non-Christian dying in some “act of God” rather than a Christian? Statistics and common experience tell us that neither has an advantage? Surely, you’d think that *at least* when it comes to acts of God, Christians wouldn’t be hurt, right? Is that what we observe in reality? Of course not.

I am sitting here typing these words on my laptop computer, inside my warm, comfortable house, with a full belly and really no greater concern other than what I’m going to spend my money on. How easy it is for me to look around and see the perfection in everything. I’m not worried about where my next meal is coming from, my needs are all well-taken care of as they have been for my entire life thus far. If I was born in Ethiopia spending the first five years of my life malnourished and in abject poverty before dying a painful death at the ripe old age of six after contracting some easily treatable disease because there was no sanitation to speak of, would I see the perfection so easily? Would you? It is estimated that there are around 2.2 billion children in the world and almost half of them are living in poverty. Is that perfect? Remember that the next time you are looking at a sunset and are tempted to let the moment carry you into some fiction of perfection.

We don’t even need to limit our inspection to humans. Life in the wild is far more perilous than the comparative safety and comfort many of us enjoy. Survival of the fittest is not just a theory for our animal cousins; it’s a way of life. If they’re not vigilant, if they’re not on top of their game for even a moment… bang! They’re dead. The strong kill the weak, the big trample the small, parasites live in and slowly and painfully kill their hosts, viruses and bacteria run rampant causing no end of problems for all life on the planet. It’s a damn vicious world out there and anyone who says it’s anything other than that needs to pull their head out of wherever it may be inserted and take a good look around. Snap out of your self-indulgent daydream and wake up. The cold, hard truth is life is anything but idyllic.

Personal Proofs

The things I’ve put in this category are the things that you sometimes hear Christians telling you were moments that changed their lives and left them in no doubt about God. Sometimes these experiences come in forms that conveniently occur on a very personal and private level, the translation being that they mean absolutely nothing to anyone else, or they happen in front of a lot of people, often at a church, but are still felt only on a deeply personal level by the individual.

I plan to look at three basic categories of “personal proofs.” The first are the cases where people claim to be speaking in tongues or collapsing in some kind of divine rapture at church. The second are those instances where people see visions or hear God’s voice in their minds/hearts. The third group of examples I want to look at are of a less tangible kind; the, “I just know it in my heart” variety.

*Speaking in Tongues and Collapsing in Church*

First of all, let me clarify what speaking in tongues actually is. It first appears in the Bible in Acts 2. Jesus’ apostles are talking in front of a large group of people from different regions who all speak different languages. Now Jesus’ apostles don’t know all of these languages but fortunately as they begin their speech, “suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.” The apostles were then “all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues,” meaning that they actually spoke in different languages to the gathered assembly. Nice, huh?

Unfortunately this kind of true miracle has never occurred since (or at all in any reliable historical record). These days people speaking in tongues are not speaking another ancient language, they’re just babbling gibberish, sometimes they dance around, sometimes they cry, sometimes they even collapse to the floor and convulse.

First of all, if this happened to someone outside of a church would you think that person had been filled by the Holy Spirit or would you think he or she had been possessed by the devil? Let me tell you, if I watched my wife suddenly collapse on the ground, start convulsing and crying and muttering some gibberish, I would first assume she had some kind of serious medical condition or maybe a mental illness. If this was ruled out I honestly don’t know what I would think, but I can promise you this, long before I thought she’d been visited by God, I would think she’d been possessed by the devil. I mean, let’s be reasonable.

What kind of God would make people collapse to the ground and start speaking gibberish? Why doesn’t God just make people feel warm inside or give them a glowing halo or something; that would be cool, right? Maybe lift them off the ground for a while, surround their body with a nimbus of white, Divine light? That’s some believable stuff! “Oh, God doesn’t actually do anything. His mere presence is too much for our mortal vessels to handle and so they react in the extreme ways you see.” Rubbish! God controls everything, or so Christians would have us believe. If God wants you to fall down, then you’ll fall down, if He wants you to be filled with Heavenly light then that will happen. Do they really expect me to believe that when our all-loving, Divine Creator fills me with His presence, I will be reduced to a babbling idiot muttering nonsense or perhaps dancing around like an idiot? Please.

Secondly, is it at all possible that these people are causing themselves to mumble nonsense? Did anyone think of that? Assuming that these people ‘lucky’ enough to be reduced to babbling idiots, are not actually charlatans willingly deceiving us, I think there has to be a high probability that they are in fact, deceiving themselves.

The capacity of the human brain for deception is amazing. Think about it. We all know about psychosomatic illnesses and hypochondriacs. A psychosomatic illness is an illness or symptoms of an illness that are caused entirely by the patient’s mental or emotional state and hypochondriacs are those cheerful people who are certain they have all manner of illnesses, sometimes even after a doctor has given the all clear.

Now, these classic examples highlight people who don’t even *want* to experience these symptoms or illnesses (at least not consciously) but how about our local Christian who claims to ‘speak in tongues?’ This person *desperately wants* or even *needs* some connection with God and is actively searching for that connection.

Imagine this scene, if you will, our faithful servant of God is fervently praying, mentally willing God to come into his life when lo and behold, he suddenly imagines his body shaking. It almost feels like his body is moving on its own. “Maybe,” he wonders… “Could this be…?” He seeks to maintain this feeling, he tries to ‘let go’ of himself, let his body be moved by God. “Is that an urge to say something?” he thinks to himself. “Let go, let go, let God, let God…” he repeats to himself like a mantra and then he opens his mouth. The rest is history.

Now, obviously this little story is not meant to be taken too literally but I think it illustrates the point quite well. In the absence of something that the mind fervently believes in (or even just wants to believe in) the human mind will often rise to the challenge to prevent disappointment.

*“God Came to me in a Dream” / “God Talked to Me”*

It always amazes me when Christians place such importance on events like these. I mean, God came to me in a dream? Does that even require a defence? I’ve met Mariah Carey, been a black man, had the strength and abilities of Neo (from The Matrix) and even received advice from sage, old men in dreams. Do I attribute any significance to these events? Of course not. What’s even funnier is that Christians themselves don’t attribute anything special to their mundane dreams; they’re just dreams after all! But if all of a sudden they dream of God or Jesus then – oh, that must be a message from above.

Everybody knows that dreams are a natural process of the subconscious mind. Okay, they’re not fully understood but we’ve all had the experience of dreaming about something related, either directly or indirectly, to something we were thinking about before sleep. This is adequate evidence to suggest that dreams are mental processes and not some kind of divine message from God or one of His angels. Enough said.

How about those Christians who claim to have seen visions or heard God talking to them while awake? What can we say of these folk? Well, there is a word that exists in English to account for non-Christians who claim to hear voices or see things that aren’t there in reality. This word is, ‘unstable.’

Our psychiatric institutions are full of patients who claim to talk to people or beings that no one else can see. Are they prophets? What about people who murder others, saying that God told them to do it? There have certainly been enough of them. Are they all lying? Was it the devil? How can you tell? “Ah, the message is what gives it away,” Christians say, “That’s how you can tell if it’s from God or not.” Well, that’s clearly dysfunctional thinking and totally illogical. If I was the devil, I’m hardly going to show up and announce myself and my intentions. I’d sneak in the backdoor with my God outfit on and slowly corrupt you from the inside. I’d make you believe you were special (I wouldn’t tell you as much but just the fact that you alone can hear my voice would be enough to delude you) and I’d lead you on a magical mystery tour away from God and the Truth without you ever knowing what was happening.

What’s the difference between a non-Christian who hears and sees non-Christian messages and a Christian who sees and hears Christian messages? This isn’t a riddle; the answer is... nothing. They are identical. It would be a mighty strange coincidence for two people to both be hearing voices but for one of them to be mentally unbalanced while the other is divinely gifted. Why should we confuse these two?

A man experiences hallucinations (of a non-Christian nature) and we seek to find out why. We ask what the cause of this dysfunction is. We try to fix the problem. But if a man experiences hallucinations with a religious slant, there are some among us who would worship him. Hallucinations are hallucinations. Voices in your head are voices in your head. Something has gone wrong with the circuitry upstairs, we need look no further than the obvious for an explanation.

Let’s also not forget the point I made above about the capacity of the human mind for deception. The halls of our psychiatric wards are clear evidence that no delusion is beyond the capabilities of our astonishing minds; mental delusions, aural hallucinations, even visual hallucinations are all possible.

The final line of defence for the Christian is my third case…

*“I Just Know it in my Heart”*

Humans are funny creatures. We have such strong convictions and beliefs and we cherish them dearly. They are more precious to us than anything else. The interesting thing is that the beliefs we hold so dear need not necessarily be based on anything factual or logical. Indeed if you were to really and truly examine your beliefs closely you would probably find your beliefs about what is true closely match what you hope to be true. Considering this, it is perhaps not surprising that many people truly believe in life after death despite the complete and total lack of evidence to support it. The exact same thing could be said for a belief in God.

Humans and human emotions are very complex things and I doubt that many, if any of us are able to totally separate our emotions (fears, hopes, joys, etc) from our decisions. As a result, our thoughts are constantly being polluted (although this may be a strong word) by our feelings. Beliefs that you, “just know it in your heart” are the most dangerous kind of beliefs because they are the ones that have no basis in reality. If they did, you wouldn’t need to, “just know it in your heart.”

What does that expression even mean? “I know it in my heart.” Perhaps I failed to understand my high school biology teacher when he told me that our hearts pump blood around our body and our brains enable us to think. Okay, so no one actually believes that they are ‘thinking’ with their heart, so what do they believe?

It is here that words like ‘soul’ and ‘spirit’ start being thrown around willy-nilly, yet more constructions that have absolutely no basis in reality. Are they false? I don’t know, but before I start calling on them to explain things hadn’t I better first conclude that they exist?

There is not a single scrap of reliable evidence to suggest that consciousness (or even a part of consciousness) resides anywhere other than our brains. Our incredibly complex brains are truly amazing and scientists are only just beginning to scratch the surface of how they work. Hadn’t we better finish with the brain, our best candidate for the source of consciousness, before we start trying to posit other fanciful notions?

The honest truth as far as we know is that our brains are where we do our thinking and so when people tell you that, “they just know in their hearts” what they really mean is that they know there is absolutely no reason for you to believe them and in fact no reason for them to believe themselves but after taking into account all of their hopes, fears, insecurities, previous experiences and a million other factors, they have decided that despite the evidence to the contrary they are choosing to believe in something illogical.

But if they told you that, they would sound crazy. So, to cover it (not just for your benefit but for their own as well) they have to invent a more plausible sounding explanation. It has worked for centuries to assist people in holding fast to foolish beliefs that they would otherwise be forced to abandon.

One of the biggest problems for us atheists (although without which, we might just be out of a job!) is that many Christians just don’t think about these things. They don’t wonder why, they don’t ask questions. They can’t afford to. If they did, they would lose all that they hold dear. As I said earlier, nothing is more important to us than our belief system and we will fight, lie, deceive others and deceive ourselves in order to preserve it. The time has come to pull our collective head out of the sand and accept reality, even though it may not be all we could have wished for. A single life lived in reality is better than a hundred lives lived in illusion.

**‘Softer’ Arguments for Christianity and Arguments Against Atheism**

What do I mean when I say ‘softer’ arguments for Christianity? These arguments are the ones that I think are less overtly forceful and tend to have more of an emotional or ‘gut’ appeal than a positive conclusion derived from rational and logical premises. Some of them are also of a more negative nature, that is, they criticise elements of atheism rather than pushing elements of faith. Despite being less rigorous and aggressive as far as arguments go, they still tend to feature a lot in the minds of believers and so I believe they warrant a mention.

Atheism is depressing

Atheism, as a system which has no need of a deity or an afterlife, offers no hope to people looking for some kind of overarching meaning to their lives or some form of everlasting life. All we have is this short lifespan of some eighty to ninety years and then it’s over. Period. Some of us will leave lasting legacies that endure for tens, hundreds, even thousands of years but ultimately this means nothing to us as individuals. When we die, that’s it, and just as depressing, while we are alive, nothing we do matters in any grand sense – there is no grand plan we are a part of, no magnificent tapestry we can claim to be a thread in. We are just another meaningless jumble of atoms living out meaningless existences in a meaningless universe. That just can’t be true!

Unfortunately it can be true. Very true. Think about it. Why can’t it be true? There is actually absolutely no reason why such a situation could not be very real. The argument that “it just can’t be that way” is based on an emotional response to life, and emotions are *always* very poor indicators of objective reality.

Tens of thousands of children starve to death each day; countless men, women and children are killed, raped or otherwise maltreated in wars and criminal activities each day; you can’t look at the paper without reading about some senseless loss of or damage to life; now all of that’s terribly depressing. But it’s also very real. Why shouldn’t it be? Who says life should be all peaches and cream? Despite your and my feelings about it, very depressing things happen all the time. An earthquake strikes killings thousands. That’s depressing. We don’t question the reality of that though.

But the existence of God and an eternal soul are things of a fundamentally different nature, aren’t they? They’re like meta-concepts, structural features of reality, not just other parts of it.

There is an element of truth to that objection. These ideas (God and a soul) are of a somewhat higher order than an earthquake or war, but should that automatically grant them some kind of special status exempt from normal considerations? I don’t think so. It might be depressing that these things don’t exist, there’s no eternity of bliss in heaven waiting for us, there’s no parent God to run to when we get a boo boo, but like all depressing notions, the fact that they are depressing, has absolutely no relevance in determining whether they are true or false.

I think it almost goes without saying (although I did just say it) that the emotional response a notion elicits is irrelevant to its veracity, but there are other reasons related to this objection to atheism, for rejecting the ideas of God and heaven.

If we live forever, then life is actually cheap. How much value does something have if it is ever present? All the things we value, we do so because they are limited in some capacity. Gold is valuable because it is limited in quantity. Would it become more or less valuable if everybody suddenly discovered that they were sitting on a goldmine? How precious is a flower that blooms for just a week compared to a flower that stays in bloom for months? Life is as precious as it is to us precisely because it doesn’t last forever.

Another idea that doesn’t make sense is that of an eternity of bliss in heaven. People tend to hold this idea in mind without really thinking about it. Just try to imagine an eternity of bliss, total happiness, where all of your needs are met… forever. How long do you think it would be before that became pretty boring?

Christians like to tempt us with a pretty real version of heaven, even claiming that the body will be physically resurrected into paradise. Sure, it sounds pretty good if you don’t actually scratch the surface, but let’s be bold and take it one step further. How are we actually going to spend our days in this paradise, what are we going to do… for all eternity? Christians tell us that everything will be perfect in heaven, (how could it be otherwise?) so what exactly is going to be the point of life then?

Even here on earth, it can be pretty easy to slip into a rut. You lose your job, can’t get a girlfriend, have no money and before you know it you’re watching TV all night, sleeping on the couch all day and living on coke and McDonalds. OK, you got me, exaggeration, but this kind of thing certainly happens and here’s the catch; in heaven, you won’t need a job, you won’t need a girlfriend, you won’t need money… you won’t need anything! Now, if you need nothing, why would you do anything? And what would you do in heaven? You are in paradise and you have an eternity to kill. I grant it might be a lot of fun at first, but everything gets old sooner or later.

I admit that at first blush, it sounds ridiculous to claim that heaven could ever become boring, but if you think about it, how could an eternity of anything, even (maybe especially) perfection, be otherwise? A lot of people would argue that it is precisely because of suffering that our lives are interesting and worthwhile.[[16]](#footnote-17) If there were no challenges to overcome, no obstacles to work around, no problems to test your mettle on, life *would* be damn boring. If all of your needs were met, *all your needs*, not just your physical ones, but your spiritual/emotional/intellectual needs as well, what would you do and why would you do it?

Please be aware that the idea of heaven being boring only *seems* ridiculous because in our minds we have associated heaven with beauty and perfection. And, more importantly, we did this without any evidence, in the same way we associate only magnificence and love with God. To say God is evil seems a blatant contradiction to most people, but that is only because we’ve been indoctrinated to believe the opposite. Just defining God as goodness obviously doesn’t make it so and defining heaven as an eternity of paradise fails on the same level. Appreciating my idea of boredom in heaven requires transcending this illogical cultural concept that has wormed its way into our collective unconscious.

If you dedicated your life to God and accepted Jesus Christ as your personal saviour you’d not just get into heaven but you’d also give your life a pretty solid source of meaning, right? Hmm, would you?

It’s actually not at all clear how you would garner more meaning from life simply by believing in God. How is the life of a believer different from the life of an atheist? Maybe, the ten commandments? But of course, as we touched on above, most of us live by the last six whether or not we are Christian; no stealing, killing, etc. So that leaves the first four, which basically boil down to worshipping God, and only God. How would that give my life any more meaning than it currently has?

Let’s say we concede that God does in fact exist. Even with that (radical) assumption there is only one way that we can derive meaning from it, which is for God to tell us how to live or provide us with some sort of schema in which we can play a vital part. This would definitely make it *seem like* our lives had meaning because there would suddenly be something greater than us, something that seems to bring order and purpose to everything. There is a plan after all; it’s not just randomness upon randomness.

Comforting. But illusory.

Being told by anyone (or anything) what to do or how to live to derive meaning from my life has the exact opposite effect. By this I mean that an action is meaningful for the actor *only* if the actor endows it with value.

If you devote your life to God and His will then you have really decided to forfeit your life and any meaning that it had the potential to provide. Think about it for a second. How can doing someone else’s will, *ever* provide you with any authentic meaning? If you don’t take responsibility for your life, there is no way you can experience the exhilaration of a life well-lived.

Interestingly enough, Christianity does have a tradition of transferring and abdicating responsibility and guilt. We are all sinners but Jesus Christ is somehow able to pay that debt for us and because of that we are somehow absolved. Only in religion could the truly noble act of forgiveness become so warped. We also see Christians everywhere giving thanks to God for all the positive things in their lives (heaven forbid they should take sinful pride in their accomplishments!) and castigating themselves for their failures (heaven forbid God could be responsible for anything less than perfect!).

I maintain that nobody can give your life meaning except you. It’s ludicrous to claim otherwise. As ludicrous as claiming that someone else can pay for your crimes and in doing so completely absolve you. As I said, it can certainly *seem* as if your life has meaning when you are doing “God’s work” but this is nothing more than an illusion created by the feeling that there is something greater than you out there. Even if it’s true and there does happen to be something greater than you out there, it cannot provide meaning for your life.

Of course, this does open the door to the notion that submitting to God’s will becomes meaningful if the submitter deems it to be so, but there is a world of difference between submitting because *you* value something and because you think someone else values it, even if that someone else is God.

If I find meaning in submission to God, that is well and good, but it is a mistake to think that God has given my life meaning. It is *me* who has given it meaning and I did that by *choosing* to follow that path in life. ‘Meaning’ is like a treasure that is always lying just under the ground, you have to dig it up yourself but no matter where you put shovel to dirt, you will always find it… unless you’re digging on someone else’s orders and then you’ll unearth nothing but ordinary rocks.

There is also the other argument that propitiating and submitting to God in order to get into Heaven (or avoid Hell) is hardly a noble or meaningful way to live. Of course, no Christian is a Christian because of Heaven or Hell, or at least so they would all tell us, but I find it impossible to believe that the lure of eternal happiness and the threat of eternal damnation don’t factor into the decision at all.

If I hold a gun to your head and tell you that unless you hug lepers I will blow your brains out; and that after you do, I will give you a million dollars, would anyone believe you when you say that you were not influenced by either my carrot or my stick and that rather you hugged lepers just because you wanted to?

Remedying Injustice

This argument considers how positively unfair and unjust life often is. All too often we see the bad guy come in first and the good guy finish last. As I’ve already mentioned, it isn’t just dirty atheists who get sick, lose money, get injured, get passed over for that promotion, have their spouse cheat on them, and in general, endure hardships of virtually every description. These things can happen to anybody at anytime, seemingly without much discrimination and certainly without any respect for religion.

But the die-hard believer need not give up yet, because “surely,” she reasons, “considering how unjust this life is, there just *has to be* some recompense in the afterlife. I mean it just wouldn’t be fair otherwise, would it.”

Naturally, it is child’s play to spot the flaw in this reasoning but before we do, I would like to point something additional out to you. Notice that the observation of the world and this life is 100% accurate. Life is often unfair. It is a slightly annoying trend for people, especially those with a new age or religious bent, to be “life affirming” and “positive.” Now, I don’t have a problem with this but it can become, in my opinion, too much. People can lean to the positive so much that they no longer see things objectively and everything becomes tainted by an overdose of positivity. “Everything happens for a reason” is a classic catch-cry of such deluded souls. Another is, “It’s all part of God’s plan, we just can’t see the big picture.”

Of course, it’s good to be positive, there’s nothing wrong with seeing the glass half-full, but it’s just foolish to ignore the half of the glass that’s actually empty. In many cases, spiritual/religious people delude themselves to the point where they are no longer even aware of the empty half. This is extremely easy to do when you live in a comfortable middle class, free from war, famine, poverty and any real association with death. That’s when you start to hear sentiments like, “Look at how perfect life is. Something this perfect must have been designed.”

Let’s scrap the ‘head in the clouds’ daydreaming and substitute in a healthy dose of reality, not pessimism, but unflinching realism. Life sometimes does suck. And this is, by the way, exactly what the believer is saying with this argument. If life isn’t unjust, then how can any afterlife provide a remedy? A remedy for what? Of course, the problem of evil is another not so subtle admission that life is sometimes pretty crappy.

So, people know that life is unjust. What’s the logical conclusion to draw from this fact? Is this universe/galaxy/planet/life created and administered by a benevolent, loving Being who loves us all equally? Given the initial observation, the logical answer is a decisive no.

I would argue that there is little need to flog this dead horse anymore, but that result is unsatisfactory to a lot of people and so Christians ignore the obvious, sensible route and start to get inventive. In the course of their tangled thinking, not only does the apparent, prevalent injustice in the world *not* disprove God, it actually *proves* the existence of an afterlife.

Let’s go back to the original statement. “Considering how unjust this life is, there just *has to be* some recompense in the afterlife. I mean it just wouldn’t be fair otherwise, would it.”

The flaw is obviously the misguided, emotionally-based, wishful-thinking inherent in the notion that, for some reason, life *should be* fair, and by fair we presumably mean that good people shouldn’t suffer (much). Give me one single, plausible reason to back up this statement and I will lay down my arms. Who says life should be fair? What right do we have to expect such a thing? As always, there is no reason to believe in such a statement and, of course, many reasons to believe the opposite.

I think there is little more that needs saying regarding this point but I would like to mention one more piece of thinking on this argument put forward by Bertrand Russell. He observed that noting how unfair this life is and inferring some kind of recompense in an afterlife makes as much sense as opening a barrel of apples, noting that the top layers are all rotten and then expecting those on the bottom to be ripe in order to somehow make up for the rotten ones. This is misguided thinking at its best.

God is Not a ‘Bigger’ Version of Us; He is a Totally Different Entity Completely Outside Space-Time

This is an easy argument to topple because it just doesn’t make sense. Sure, it sounds marvellous when the priest is spouting it in church. “Don’t worry about those atheists criticising God. They’ve made a conceptual mistake; they’re attacking a ‘straw*God.*’ They ask you, ‘Why would a God do this?’ ‘Why wouldn’t He do that?’ ‘How could He have done this?’ I’m telling you it makes no sense to ask these questions because God is nothing like anything we can even imagine. He is greater than our wildest dreams, in every way.”

The problem is that this approach places God just too far above us to have any relevance for us anymore. If God is more than we can imagine, then how can we possibly have any kind of personal relationship with Him? A feature that every Christian believes in and most believe they enjoy. This God runs the risk of becoming an abstract, indistinct concept and can certainly never fill the shoes of the all-loving protector that most Christians subscribe to. Of course, this doesn’t stop them from claiming both, often in the space of a single sentence.

In addition, just think about the notion of God being outside space and time. What does that even mean? Space and time are dimensions. How can something be ‘outside’ a dimension? Where is the ‘edge’ of a dimension? If God is outside them, where is He? When is He? These are deep philosophical concepts that Christians just bandy about willy-nilly in a most irresponsible fashion. Again, they sound good if you only submit them to a cursory inspection, but as soon as you probe a little deeper, things start to come apart at the edges.

Naturally, if God is outside of time, it must be impossible for Him to do anything, including create the universe. But it is even impossible for Him to think. Every act we can carry out requires time to complete it in. Without time for an act to begin, end and endure through, there can simply be no action.

“But these are all human acts! You’re still thinking like a human, we’ve already told you that God is nothing like that!”

However, Christians have given us nothing to substitute for human acts. They insist that He does act, they insist that they talk to Him and they insist that He talks back. God’s super-temporal and super-spatial existence seems to be no hindrance to, at least *human-like* acts… when called for, of course. In fact, His super-dimensionality is starting to look like what it is, a convenient cloak that can be donned when necessary to avoid answering the hard questions.

“Welcome God into your life,” they tell you in one breath. “God is beyond space and time,” they tell atheists in the next.

God is a chameleon concept which jumps back and forth between parent/friend and unknowable/super-temporal entity whenever the situation suits.

The Argument from Improbability / God is a Better Hypothesis

I have lumped these two arguments together because they are closely related. I will treat them separately but hopefully you will see how similar they are at the end of this section.

The argument from improbability simply states that it is highly unlikely and improbable to assert that this amazing universe (and it is without doubt, amazing!) and all of the amazing things we see in it could have arisen without the intervention of an intelligent being, and this being we call God.

I highly approve of the methodology behind this line of arguing. What we are doing here is looking for what is *probable*, not merely possible. This has been a constant theme throughout this essay. It’s not enough to claim that God is possible; too many theories are possible, including atheism. We need to look for what is probable and accept what we find, because I think it’s clear that as far as religion goes, we are not going to get a definitive answer one way or the other. If God exists, He is unbelievably shy (or just not that into us) and if He doesn’t, well, we can’t prove that anymore than we can prove fairies or dragons don’t exist. So ‘probable’ is the benchmark we are going to have to settle for.

While I like the reasoning in this argument, I disagree with the result. I do think that this universe is amazing, but I’m not sure that it’s improbable or unlikely. And quite frankly no one else on the planet is either (and if they tell you they are, they’re clearly lying – probably to persuade you to believe whatever religion they’re selling). This universe may be extremely unlikely but we know it happened at least once, because here we are. On the other hand, maybe universes with life in them occur all the time. That’s a notion at least as likely (I would argue more so) as the notion that God exists and created this one.

I think it’s pretty hard to argue with the notion that God is the ultimate as far as improbabilities go. A Being outside of space and time, who we can have a personal relationship with, who is not just above the laws of our universe but actually created them! The energy that God must be able to wield (from a physics standpoint) is simply staggering, and of course, He’s eternal and everywhere at the same time. And just in case you’re still not convinced, God Himself had no creator, He just always was.

I defy you to conjure up a more improbable Being than the Christian God. If we (as life) are unlikely and this universe (as an organic whole) is unlikely, then surely the fellow who created it all must be even more unlikely.

Ultimately we find ourselves running into the same sort of problems we encountered with the design argument. Something improbable can hardly have come from something of even greater improbability without that thing in turn, crying out for an explanation. Of course, “God just always was,” for some reason, just doesn’t cut the mustard.

The second argument, I first heard from Dinesh D’Souza in a debate he was taking part in. It’s interesting because it’s a peculiar kind of delusion which it’s easy to see the appeal of, but also disturbingly easy to see the gaping hole in.

God is a better hypothesis. If we postulate God as the Divine Creator, then in one fell swoop we have explained everything from the cell to consciousness to the apparent fine-tuning of the universe, and so on. With God all things are possible… and explainable.

But I would stop you right there. Have we explained everything? Had the ancients *explained* the movement of the sun across the sky by appeal to God? Had they *explained* the good harvest when they believed/hypothesised that God was happy with their sacrifices? We need to be careful when throwing the word ‘explain’ about.

Of course, with the benefit of hindsight, we can see that they had, in effect, explained nothing. Their understanding of these processes and events was almost nil. So why would we assume that the God hypothesis still works to explain things we don’t currently understand? Any Christian who tells you that they can explain consciousness by appeal to God is dreaming. An explanation requires more than, “God snapped his fingers and… voila!” Clearly, that has explained nothing. We still know nothing about what consciousness is or how it arises, as testified to by the fact that, neuroscientists, despite the existence of Christians and their God hypothesis, are still able to find gainful employment.

If Heaven was Wish Fulfilment, Then Why Create a Hell?

This is the final part in my ‘soft arguments’ section and as you can see isn’t really an argument for Christianity at all, rather, it’s a response to an argument against Christianity. I thought I would deal with it before we move into the next section though.

It seems fair enough, if Heaven and Christianity represented nothing more than wish fulfilment then why would Christians have invented concepts like Hell and the Devil?

Let’s take these issues one at a time. Why invent Hell?

Well, at its most basic, no matter how modern day Christians try to get around this fact, Hell is a punishment, *the* ultimate punishment. Hell has been very clearly described as a “furnace of fire” by Jesus / God Himself and that is a holiday resort compared to how various respected Christians have described it since.

So who exactly will be cast into Hell? The wicked, of course, i.e. non-Christians. And how can you avoid this terrible fate? By becoming a Christian. Hmm, is there a motive there for creating Hell? You better believe it.

Not just that, if there’s no punishment for not being a Christian, why would anyone join? If everybody died and went to Heaven or there wasn’t even any kind of afterlife, then who would go to church every Sunday and tithe x% of their income (gross, of course). Who would have paid for all these churches in the first place? Would the Vatican have been able to amass its very sizeable fortune if no one believed in Hell?

What about the Devil? Is he part of our wish, too?

Well, like Hell, the Devil is also a big stick driving us into the arms of our Christian brothers and sisters. The Devil is pure evil incarnate. If you aren’t a good Christian, the Devil will get you and drag you down to his home, a place you definitely don’t want to go. Is that motivation to go to church and make sure your children are baptised? You bet. The Devil is a key component in the carrot and stick strategy.

We also need a scapegoat (the Devil traditionally has the bottom half of a goat by the way) for all the observable evil and suffering in the world. If there’s no Devil then we have a real problem trying to explain where all of this suffering comes from. Of course, the Devil isn’t anywhere near as powerful as God so God must be letting His counterpart run around stirring up mischief, so the lie is revealed anyway…

And finally, what kind of story doesn’t have a villain? Virtually every culture in the history of humanity has had a god of destruction or evil for the ‘good’ god to battle and finally overcome. What good movie lacks a bad guy? We have a seemingly instinctive inclination to view the world in terms of good and evil or light and dark. Almost every myth we have ever created has adhered to this formula. Would the story of Christianity have been even half as popular and pervasive if God was the only force in the universe? Would we even have believed it at all?

**Arguments against Christianity**

Okay, we’ve looked at some of the typical arguments for Christianity and I hope we’ve come to the conclusion that they are fatally flawed. Let’s now jump the fence (although keeping to the same side of the bigger divide) and look at some reasons why Christianity itself, and in fact, belief in *any* supreme deity, just doesn’t make sense.

How Old is the Earth?

There’s really not a lot to say about this particular subject, but it is quite damning for Christians who claim the Bible is accurate. If you go through Genesis and count the years from Adam to the flood and accept the chronology of seventeenth century Irish archbishop, James Ussher, then it turns out the world was created at midday on Sunday, 23 October, 4004BC. This gives us a planet just over 6,000 years old. Nice one, Mr Ussher.

This quite clearly presents an immediate problem for Christians. First of all, scientists estimate that the earth is over 4 billion years old, a conclusion they didn’t come to by walking around with their heads in the clouds or reading a book, but by looking at the facts and accepting the answers that came. Now even if this figure is wrong, to satisfy Christians, it would have to be wrong by billions of years. I am certainly not saying that science is perfect, but it would be very interesting indeed if it was out by that much. Still, in keeping with the motto of this book, I don’t want to go too far in this direction because that line of inquiry starts to get technical very quickly. Let’s instead see if common sense can decide the matter for us.

Let’s take something that I hope is fairly incontestable; dinosaurs. I think everybody agrees that dinosaurs once existed and roamed the planet. The fossils that scientists have found attest to that fact quite nicely. So, what happened to them?

According to young earth creationists, dinosaurs must have roamed the earth with humans, which is mighty strange. Why would God create a massive race of creatures that dwarf and could easily kill His most precious Adam and Eve whom He creates a little later? (The order of these events will of course depend on which creation story you believe) That doesn’t make any sense at all. A race as massive as the large dinosaurs would certainly rule the planet while they were on it. Imagine trying to establish a village if Tyrannous Rex was running around outside with his cousins.

And then, after God went to the trouble of creating these massive beasts, he doesn’t even bother to save them in the flood. I assume that is how they were wiped out. Now, I thought Noah was ordered to take one couple of every species up into his ark, so where did he store the diplodocus and velociraptors? How come he didn’t save some of the smaller ones that we know existed?

I’m not even going to bother defending this claim from a creationist viewpoint because there is really no sensible answer. At the end of the day, there is just no reason to disbelieve what the scientists have to say on this subject. They don’t have a vested interest in the outcome. They didn’t start out with a goal in mind and try to manipulate things to get to that goal, which is exactly what creationists do. Young earth creationists need a low figure for the age of the earth and they go looking for it, bastardising science in the process.

No scientist ever thought, “I think the earth is 4.5 billion years old. How can I prove that?” They analysed the data and devised tests and experiments that would allow them to discover the truth, not as written in a book, but as what really happened. In fact, no one, scientists included, expected the earth to be as old as it is currently thought to be but they eventually had to bow to the weight of the evidence, something creationists are not particularly well-known for doing; accepting facts.

The Problem of Evil

This is a classic in the genre and has been around for a while. It continues to stick because it offers a genuine problem for Christians who pray to an all-loving Protector. It basically asks the question, “How can an all-loving and all powerful God exist while we see so much unhappiness in the world?”

Clearly, there is an enormous amount of suffering present on our planet and not all of it happens to evil people. Christians and non-Christians alike are susceptible to a myriad of terrible and painful experiences. It’s funny how in the mind of a Christian if something bad happens to them it becomes a “trial of God” or something equally idiotic while if the same thing happens to someone who doesn’t believe then it must be because they lack faith. But I digress…

With all of this suffering in the world happening to good and bad people without discrimination, how can an all-loving and all powerful God exist? The reality is that He can’t. If an all-loving and all powerful God existed then He would surely protect His people, at least.

One defence for a Christian is to argue that God has abandoned us because he became so angry at us constantly worshipping other gods. This particular incident is recorded in the Bible as well (see Judges in the Old Testament) and God actually says that He will leave all of the other nations with them (the Israelites) so that they will be tested and He will see who will follow his rules and remain true to Him.

This would be fine except for the fact that it seems like a very unloving thing to do and hearkens back to our earlier discussion about love, where we concluded that true, unconditional love involved no jealousy and no insecurities. Why God, the Creator of the universe would ever be so angry with us (His children) that He would abandon us and watch us suffer without helping even though some of us cry out to Him is beyond me. Clearly God has the power to cure us, heal us and take away the pain (He’s not much of a God if he doesn’t) and yet He refuses to. The notion that He’s testing us to see who is faithful just doesn’t make sense. Besides which, doesn’t He already know?

Imagine you are a mother and your daughter consistently breaks your rules. Would you kick her out and leave her to fend for herself? Well, this is something of a close call and in some extreme situations you might, but then would you sit by and watch while she suffers and repents and begs for your help? Even if all of her friends hated you and refused to change their ways as long as your daughter saw the error in her ways and wanted to come back home, you wouldn’t turn her away, would you? If you did, would you think of yourself as loving? Would you think of yourself as a good mother? I doubt it.

And yet this is what God is doing every day. Every day, how many prayers do you think God gets from good Christians? Thousands? Tens of thousands? Millions? He is sitting by and watching His own people dying of cancer, suffering with arthritis, being murdered, raped, beaten and suffering in a hundred other ways. Maybe I could understand if all of this was happening only to “stiff-necked” (a phrase God uses repeatedly in the Old Testament) non-Christians but it’s not. Through God’s inaction, He is not just condoning the pain but is causing it. If you have the power to stop something but choose not to, you are just as guilty as the one doing the damage.

As an all powerful Being, nothing happens without God’s will and so He is even more in the firing line because He must have a hand in everything that happens. God is certainly serious. When He says He’s going to abandon you, He doesn’t do it by halves. If you’re out, you’re really out. I just can’t accept this attitude in an all-loving God.

Paralleling this ‘reason’ is the notion that evil is the result of a corrupted world. If we had followed God’s directives then all would be peachy. I whole-heartedly disagree with this idea. People forget that we have already tried the Christian state in the middle ages. What happened as a result of that? Witch burnings, inquisitions, destruction of secular knowledge, rampant sexism and elitism, and suppression of all things non-Christian, including science.

The unfortunate truth is that any system of religion eventually breeds exactly those kinds of intolerances and a technologically backwards culture. The reason this is unavoidable is because religion is based on myth and fantasy. When science (the quest for truth) and civilisation (the development of cultures) evolve (as they always will, you can only hold back these natural human tendencies for so long) the myths and restrictions that all religions rely so heavily upon will be challenged. When that happens, the religion can either sit back peacefully while its dogma is steadily eroded and shown to be false, or they can fight back… Inquisition style.

Another problem with this is, let’s assume that we have gone astray, why doesn’t God lovingly intervene and guide us back to the path? For God that would be a piece of cake and for a loving God it would be a pleasure. If your children go off the tracks do you attempt to lovingly steer them back or do you leave them to fend for themselves?

It is true that people must make their own mistakes before they will learn but how many mistakes do we have to make before God will intervene? How many women must be raped? How many babies have to be born disfigured, crippled or mentally handicapped? How many billions of people must be killed over the history of humanity before God will do something to help us? Why must even one innocent suffer? Instead of searching for excuses we should just accept the logical answer… they shouldn’t. And in the presence of a loving God, they wouldn’t.

In a similar vein to the last point, Christians also claim that free will cannot truly exist without the possibility of evil. This is an interesting point and sounds good at an abstract, philosophical level but again fails at the level of details.

True free will cannot exist if it is impossible to do evil. That much is true. But why does that mean that the innocent Christian youth must develop cancer and die an agonising death? Why must an earthquake kill hundreds of people? Why must a Hitler arise and slaughter millions of God’s chosen people? Why can’t God at least look out for the people who believe in Him and keep His commandments?

“Oh, it doesn’t work like that.”

Why the hell not! Christians want us to believe in a loving God powerful enough to create the entire universe but one who can’t (or won’t) protect those who believe in Him from, a) those who don’t, b) ‘acts of God’ and c) any one of hundreds of naturally occurring physical or mental tragedies. It works any way that God wants it to work. If this is the way it works then it’s the way that God wanted it to work… unless He doesn’t exist at all.

Another defence is that evil is somehow inevitable or beneficial in our lives. I have actually touched on this earlier in the ‘atheism is depressing’ section. I have some sympathy with this defence and do, in fact, think that some evil or suffering is beneficial in our lives. Unfortunately for the problem of evil defence though, what I have a problem with here is the sheer amount of evil and suffering we see around us.

We may need a certain amount of suffering and hardship to make our lives meaningful but can this defence justify the sheer volume we seem to be inundated with? Now, we’re not just talking about individual hardships, the struggle to get the promotion or find a girlfriend, but terrible, horrific crimes against humanity which are being carried out every day. People are being tortured, beaten, raped, maimed, slaughtered by the thousands in ways we struggle to label as anything other than ‘senseless,’ and not just ‘people’ but ‘*innocent* people.’ This defence is impotent in the face of the facts.

Naturally, in a point closely related to what has been said already, if evil is inevitable or beneficial then how can there be no evil in Heaven? Why are evil and suffering useful here on Earth but suddenly superfluous to requirements in Heaven? It’s the classic double standard.

Slightly off topic I have an (another) additional point I would like to make. A certain amount of disharmony *is* productive in that it gives us the chance to grow and test ourselves. And this is why I have a problem with the lives of monks and nuns. We all acknowledge that they are peaceful, spiritual people who live lives full of peace and tranquillity (at least some of them), but I think it’s easy to be centred and peaceful when you don’t have to face any of the typical challenges most people face every day. Monks don’t have to make money, battle with people on the subway, buy groceries, pay the bills, try for that promotion, enrol their children in school, etc. Now if you can be peaceful amid all that hustle and bustle then I commend you because you are truly worthy of praise and have actually achieved something. Monks claim to be centred and balanced but they haven’t actually tested themselves. Why wouldn’t they be calm and happy? Anyone can be balanced and serene when they live lives devoid of unbalancing and chaotic variables.

There is one more defence that I will consider before we leave the problem of evil. That is the idea that physical life is a kind of trial or test before we ascend to Heaven. There actually isn’t much to say about this point. It is an explanation that completely bypasses reason and commonsense. Sure, it *might* be true, but we didn’t come to this conclusion through any logical thinking process or analysis of the facts. Instead, we embraced concepts that have no basis in reality, blended them with our own beliefs and desires and invented a plausible but unlikely scenario.

Consider this analogy. I look outside on a windy day and see a leaf racing across the pavement. Now I could assume that it is the wind doing this (evil exists because some people are bad and there is no God to counteract them) or I could invent a fanciful explanation about how the leaf has some kind of intelligence and is able to propel itself down the street (evil is a test for us set by a ‘loving’ God before we go to Heaven). Both explain the observation and both are feasible, in the strict sense of the word, but only one is sensible. The question (as with all claims of this nature) is not just in its possibility but in its *realistic* possibility.

There is an additional problem for this defence of the problem of evil. For it to make any sense at all there are two additional things that must be real; God and Heaven. If we turn our analysis to them we find, surprisingly for some but in line with what we’ve already discussed, that there is no solid evidence for either. The defence comes up wanting, on all possible levels of analysis.

Christianity: Just Another Myth

Christians sure are lucky to have their Bible and their Jesus to protect them, aren’t they? I mean everything that they believe must be true! Christianity is the best religion, right?

How many religions are there? Trying to count them all is like trying to count the number of stars in the sky. It’s possible but as soon as you’re finished you have to go back to the start and add the new ones that formed while you were counting the first time around. The big ones I guess are Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. But of course, it doesn’t stop there. Even within these large denominations there are a myriad of smaller sects each claiming to be the one true path to God/Paradise/Nirvana.

Now assume I am a man looking for God. I want to make a connection with God and, after buying into all the hype, want to secure for myself a place in Heaven. How can I possibly know which of the major religions are able to guarantee me safe passage in the afterlife? Of course, the wrong choice would see me sent straight to Hell. Each proponent of each religion assures me that their religion is the right one.

Assuming, with a little bit of luck, I manage to find the right religion, I then have to choose the correct denomination. Taking Christianity for example, should I become a Roman Catholic, a Protestant, an Anglican, a Baptist or go the Restorationist route and become a Jehovah’s Witness or a Latter Day Saint? Don’t forget, only one of these religions is correct. The right choice will take me to Heaven, the wrong one… well… you know where that will send me.

Now human beings tend to be products of their upbringing and will often adopt the same religion as their parents or peers or as a result of social influences. The idea that God would cast me adrift at this veritable banquet of religions and leave me to find the ‘perfect’ religion with my heavily familial and socially influenced mind, is complete anathema to me. Just think about it for a second. It’s crazy! What if some obscure sect in Hinduism was the correct religion? No Westerners would ever even have a chance of finding it. Hell for us all.

Ignoring other religions for now let’s just focus on Christianity once more. Is it at least unique? I mean it was the first on the scene, right? Have a look at these other beliefs from civilisations that either pre-date Christianity or sprang up around the same time and note the similarities:

1. The Golden Rule, “Do to no-one what you would not want done to you” (as the Pharisee Rabbi Hillel phrased it), as occurred in virtually every culture and religion ever known to man.
2. The Egyptian god Osiris was the god of the underworld. He would sit on a great throne where the souls of the just would praise him. All those who pass his tests became worthy to enter The Blessed Land. Oh, and Osiris was also killed and raised from the dead, too.
3. In Greek mythology dead souls were judged by three Gods. The heroes and virtuous souls would go to the wondrous Elysian Fields while the souls of the wicked were condemned to Tartarus. Those neither good nor bad went to the shadowy Meadows of Ashpodel.
4. Apollonious Tyaneus performed a number of miracles including:

* causing food to appear at his bidding
* causing statues to come to life
* raising a young girl from death

1. The Pythia was the priestess presiding over the Oracle of Apollo at Delphi. Over 500 Oracles of Delphi are known to have survived and over half of these are said to be historically accurate.
2. In two locations in Greece, water flowing from the spring in the temple of Dionysus changed to wine on his feast days.
3. Romulus, one of the founders of Rome in Roman legend, was born to a mortal woman and the God of war, Mars.
4. In Hinduism, Krishna, was an avatar (an incarnation) of the God Vishnu and was born without a sexual union. He was also secretly taken away and given to foster parents to raise because his father believed him to be in danger.
5. In Hinduism, Arjuna was born to a mortal woman and the invocation of Indra, king of the demi gods.
6. Buddhists believe that Siddhartha Gautama meditated under a tree for 49 days to attain enlightenment. He then travelled the countryside gathering followers and teaching the path to enlightenment.
7. Gesar, the Savior of Tibet, at the moment of his death, was chanting on a mountain top when his clothes suddenly fell empty to the ground.
8. The body of the first Guru of Sikhs, 'Guru Nanak Dev Ji,' is said to have disappeared and flowers were left in place of his dead body.
9. Stories of the Egyptian god Horus had been circulating for centuries before the birth of Christ, including:

* Horus’ mother was called Meri (as in Mary) and his foster-father was called Se (as in Jo-SE-ph).
* Horus’ birth was heralded by the star Sirius.
* Herut tried to have Horus murdered as an infant.
* There is no information about Horus’ life between the ages of 12 and 30.
* Horus was baptised at 30 years of age.
* Horus resists temptation from his arch-rival.
* Horus walked on water, cast out demons, healed the sick, restored sight to the blind and "stilled the sea by his power."
* Horus gave a famous address known as the “Sermon on the Mount.”
* Horus was killed by crucifixion and resurrected after 3 days.
* Horus also had a title, KRST, The Annointed One.

1. At Trophonius and Delos, the Pagan priestesses spoke in tongues.
2. Mithra was a sun deity who was born on Earth (the religion itself started about 14 centuries before Christ) and had the following traits / experiences:

* He had 12 followers or disciples with whom he shared a last sacrament.
* He performed miracles.
* He sacrificed himself for world peace.
* After his death he was buried in a tomb and resurrected after 3 days.
* His sacred day was Sunday, the “Lord’s Day.”
* Mithra was reported to have said, “He who shall not eat of my body nor drink of my blood so that he may be one with me and I with him, shall not be saved."
* He was called "the Good Shepherd" and identified with both the Lamb and the Lion.
* Mithraists also believed that on a day of judgement, the dead would be raised back to life.

As a final kick in the teeth, a Catholic Bishop’s headdress is called a ‘mitre.’

Now from all of this, is it my intention to promote these other myths and beliefs as true? No? Is it to claim that Christianity ‘borrowed’ ideas from these sources? No. Am I even suggesting that Christianity is a blend of a number of other myths and religions that were floating around at the time, which Romans were quite adept at doing? No.[[17]](#footnote-18) It is simply to say that Christianity is not special in history. Nothing it proposes is unique and none of its outlandish claims are any more deserving of attention than the myriad myths and legends that *every* single culture in history has. Almost all other religions and myths have disappeared or are at least regarded as nothing more than myths, and quite rightly so, considering that’s what they are, but somehow Christianity has transformed itself from myth status to not just truth, but Divine truth.

There is a true miracle at work here but it has nothing to do with Jesus. The miracle is how Christianity succeeded in turning a myth into ‘fact’ when all other similar myths faded into the realm of primitive beliefs and interesting stories.

Incidentally, a little off topic here but still relevant, I hope you are noticing that many of my points are closely related to each other and I am repeating myself quite frequently. That is not a coincidence (or due to poor writing, at least I hope not!). It is because a simple set of core, sensible, logical arguments suffice to defeat all claims made by Christianity. This isn’t rocket science. It’s just about looking at what Christianity claims, looking at what we observe in reality and thinking about it sensibly. Easy, really.

Changing Doctrine

Christianity comes direct from God and Jesus, right? As such it should surely be impervious to criticism and should surely be eternal, like God and Jesus themselves, right? Unfortunately for Christians this is just not the case. Christianity changes its rules and doctrines depending on the social and political climate. I’ve already covered some of these things so here is a simplified list of the things that God mandated in the Old Testament but Jesus changed in the New Testament:

1. God says, “An eye for an eye.” Jesus flatly refutes this.
2. God treats lepers by out-casting them. Jesus heals them.
3. God destroys his enemies. Jesus loves them.
4. God never once promises Heaven or Hell or any form of everlasting life. Jesus was the first to speak of both.
5. God prohibits any form of work on the Sabbath. Jesus works on the Sabbath and openly challenges the Pharisees on this point of scripture.

Are there any other changes that took place after that? There sure are. Like any idea that develops over time, the life of Christianity has an evolution that can clearly be seen when one reads the Bible:

1. God is certainly clear on the fact that He is only interested in the Israelites and Jesus backs this up (See Matt 10 and Matt 15). Paul overturns this by repeatedly claiming that Gentiles (non Jews) have suddenly become ‘eligible’ to enter Heaven and God shows no favouritism.
2. Neither God nor Jesus himself ever suggest that Jesus died for our sins. Paul invents this interesting notion all by himself.
3. God was very clear and particular on how important sacrificing was. Paul abolishes it by saying that Jesus’ death more than makes up for sins you may commit.
4. God was very insistent about circumcision and how important it is. Paul denies it has any real meaning.
5. The concept of Original Sin was invented by Paul. No one before him even hints at this notion.

It is quite clear how and why Paul implemented these new rules. Paul came on the scene after Jesus at a time when Christianity was still very much a fledgling religion. One of his main goals was to strengthen the Church and build its power up. To accomplish these goals he needed numbers and the Jews alone were insufficient. He had to open it up to the general public somehow. To do that he simply abolished all the old rules that meant only Jews were able to be saved. He claimed to have had a vision from God telling him that the gates were now open for all people to join the church and find salvation. Perfect timing, huh?

Surely nothing changed after Paul’s time though, right? Wrong.

1. The Church used to search for and burn (suspected) witches at the stake. This is now, apparently wrong.
2. The Church, in the same period, was also actively searching for and punishing anyone suspected of ‘heresy’ which was and remains nothing more than a belief that differs from those of the Church. Can anyone say, ‘free speech?’
3. In the 1600’s the Church, relying on Scripture, asserted that the Earth was the centre of the Universe. It seems they were wrong.
4. In some Churches, homosexuals (and even women, God forbid!) are now allowed to hold high positions.
5. Women are now (almost) equal, even in most Christian’s eyes. God and Paul are very clear on what a women’s place should be. (Jesus doesn’t say much about it – but as I have already mentioned, none of his disciples were women)

As you can see, some aspects of doctrine are undergoing constant change. ‘God’s thoughts seem to be in constant flux. This seems extremely odd to me. A few of the points above are so interesting that they deserve extra mention. Let us spend some time giving them the attention they deserve.

God and Jesus are totally different in their outlooks and recommendations. So much so that when I first read the Bible I struggled to see any similarities and really struggled to see how Christians blindly reconcile the two. But aside from these, “Christ clauses,” Jesus also does something that would forever change Christianity… he introduces the concepts of Heaven and Hell.

These twin concepts are so crucial to Christianity that it’s impossible to imagine it without them. How could God have neglected to mention them? He promises the Promised Land and the chance to have many, many babies and He threatens plagues and pain and suffering upon generations and generations of descendents but never once mentions life after death, in either Heaven of Hell. Why not?

Jesus died for our sins on the cross, right? This is another key tenet of Christianity that this time, Jesus, fails to mention. Jesus does give strong indications that in his death he will glorify God and draw people to him so that whoever believes in him will attain salvation, but he never says anything about his death atoning for everyone’s sins. This would be left for Paul to ‘reveal’ later in the New Testament.

There is one more key concept to round out our ‘trinity of beliefs’ crucial to any Christian; Original Sin. Surely a concept as powerful and damning (literally) as this one should come up somewhere in the Bible? Well, it doesn’t, although it can be inferred from two passages of Paul’s but once more God and Jesus both fail to teach this critical doctrine to their devoted followers. Why?

The final point I want to draw a little focus to is the ‘little’ argument that surfaced between the church and the famous heretic, Galileo Galilei. It was only just over 400 years ago that the Church, having manoeuvred itself into a position of considerable power, attempted to suppress one of the greatest scientists who ever lived. Why? Galileo claimed that the earth was not the centre of the Universe and was in fact revolving around the sun. The Church, referring to sections in the Bible such as 1 Chr 16:30 “The world also is firmly established, / It shall not be moved” believed the earth to be the centre of everything. (How couldn’t it be? God placed us here!) Sadly, this great man was placed under house arrest and all publication of his works was forbidden after he was found ‘guilty’ (and I do use that term loosely) of defending an opinion as probable after it had been declared contrary to Holy Scripture. Can you believe that!

But what is even harder to believe is that this blow didn’t put an end to the religion once and for all. According to everything Christians believed, everything they said their God had done, Man was His greatest creation and we were special, sitting in our privileged spot in the universe. Despite this fervent belief eventually being proven totally false, Christianity rolled with the punches and simply changed their doctrine, “Of course the Earth wasn’t the centre of the universe! It was just metaphorical!” and continued on its ignorant path forward (or backward).

Fortunately, hindsight is perfect and with it we can take a look at this chameleon-like doctrine and provide some understanding into why it has changed.

In the beginning of the Old Testament, when God was at His terrifying best leading the Israelites on a series of devastating war campaigns in between slaughtering thousands of them Himself, that was exactly what the Israelites needed. They were a lost tribe who desperately needed a place to settle. They needed rules and punishments to base their society on. They needed a strict and strong hand to bolster them. Fortunately, ‘God’ provided all of these things for them.

When Jesus came on the scene there was less need for these basic elements of a burgeoning society. He wanted to establish a following. For anything to be appealing to the masses it has to offer something of value. A Promised Land was no longer going to be bait, the Israelites didn’t need a new home; he needed something else. This is where the ingenious concepts of Heaven and Hell came into being. Jesus used the proverbial carrot and stick method to build on the foundation that had already been laid by the Old Testament God and changed some of the harsher, less humane policies (such as stoning people for working on Sunday) to moderate the mandates of his overly strict predecessor. In life after death, Jesus found something that offers an enormous payoff, eternal life in Heaven (which appeals to our innate fear of death) and at the same time contains a huge threat, an eternity in Hell. Better yet, no one could ever prove him wrong. To do so one would have to die which presents obvious communication problems.

Jump to the time after Jesus’ death, when Paul starts getting busy. Now, when Paul joins the mix his main task is to take what Jesus had started and build it up into a flourishing religion. He needed members. Unfortunately, the Israelites alone were never going to give him the strength of numbers that he wanted and so he had to open Christianity up to all races. In one fell swoop he abolished the ‘no Gentiles’ policy of both God and Jesus and promised anyone, as long as they accept Jesus Christ as their saviour, a place in Heaven. To this end he also eliminated the need for circumcision and decided that sacrificing animals was no longer necessary. Clearly, he was trying to reach a wider audience with his teachings.

Paul also wanted to strengthen the need for a belief in Jesus to reach Heaven and so he added two new elements to the mix, the concept of original sin and the fact that Jesus died for our sins. Without these elements, people could still believe that as long as they lived good, sin-free lives they should still have a chance of getting into Heaven. In another fell swoop, Paul captured all of those people by introducing the fear that no matter how good they were, unless they came to his religion and accepted that Jesus died for their sins, they would never, ever enter Heaven; strong stuff, especially for credulous people who lived two thousand years ago.

Later, in the middle ages, after the church had gathered quite a bit of power it changed its tactics a little (after inventing heaven and hell and original sin there were few other doctrinal changes they could make to convince people) and started actively going after those who refused to believe in Christ. They took the word, which they had invented for any pagan belief, ‘heresy,’ and proclaimed it illegal and punishable by death. A little later would come the infamous witch hunts which were a highly visible method of stamping out competition.

Continuing forward through time, we find a man called Galileo Galilei. Here, we find ourselves in an era where science is just beginning to assert itself and make bolder and bolder predictions. Until this time religion had garnered a lot of power for itself and without anyone to challenge its claims had been positing theories (not as theories mind you, but as facts) about subjects that were just starting to be understood and whose mysteries were starting to be unravelled by science. Galileo supported the notion that the sun was the centre of the galaxy and Earth just one of a number of planets revolving around it. The church, failing to realise its own limitations, attempted to block these ‘outright lies’ and heretic beliefs and even succeeded in placing Galileo under house arrest until his death. Fortunately, for us, they were unable to stem the scientific spirit which surged ahead and eventually overwhelmed religion, proving it completely wrong and leaving it in its considerable wake.

Incidentally, it is for this reason that the chasm must exist between science and religion and anyone who tries to reconcile the two will inevitable fail. Science aims to explore and understand the universe while religion thinks it has already been given the answers by God (or Buddha, or Allah, or the Cosmic Force, or whatever other name kids are calling it these days). Only one theory can be right, the other must be false. Because religion is based on nonsense (i.e. a God who doesn’t exist and His teachings) they will always be proven wrong when they try to make predictions that encroach on anything observable and verifiable. (See the sun-centred theory and evolution, although some die-hard creationists maintain the opposite, no serious scientist, i.e. everyone except crackpot religious folk, defends the theory that the Earth is 6,000 years old). Therefore, religion must hide out in areas like consciousness and spirit and faith because it is only in these regions currently beyond scientific inquiry that they can posit their wild claims and remain unchallenged.

And now, in our present age where society has become considerably more equal and accepting, (at least compared to our middle age ancestors) values have changed once more, homosexuality is becoming less ‘offensive’ and women are treated as (depending on who you talk to) equals for the first time in history. To keep up with these societal trends, some churches are now breaking the mandates laid down in the Bible and granting women and homosexuals more rights. They have no choice but to change with society because their congregation is made up of members from that society and if they continue to advocate old-fashioned and unacceptable values they will lose those supporters.

Categorising and reviewing these doctrinal adjustments and amendments shows two things. It shows that the religion is just like any other business, it needs people (clients) to operate and therefore has to entice their followers (consumers) with promises of Heaven (advertising) and scare them with threats of Hell (smear campaigns) or just killing those who ‘commit heresy’ (eliminating the competition). It also shows that their ‘gospel’ straight from their God or their prophet changes more than their underwear and is sometimes just plain wrong. As I said before, gospel from God should never change and it goes without saying that it should never be wrong.

**Religion: The Good**

Despite the fact that I’m definitely an atheist there are a couple of positive points to religion. I want to take a break and point these out here.

Genuinely Nice People

Most Christians out there are really, genuinely nice people and if you can break through the dogma and religious rubbish, the ‘love thy neighbour’ foundation of Christianity is a nice one. I have always been especially fond of, “Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.” Many Christians don’t discriminate against others, they don’t get caught up in the heaven / hell hype, they just try to live good lives and believe what they choose to believe. I respect that decision one hundred percent and would never interfere with that right.

At the end of the day if you strip away the need to ‘recruit’ followers and the empty doctrine that *always* accompanies religions, basically what you have is people trying to be good. Who can argue with that?

Christianity Fulfils a Human Longing

Humans are a curious people. We are deathly afraid of dying, indeed our greatest drive is the one to preserve ourselves. We are also extremely susceptible to a degree of existential strife. Who hasn’t gazed skywards at least once in their lives and hoped that someone or something would help them? Who hasn’t asked, “Why am I here?” We’ve all felt lonely and empty and afraid.

Christianity is like a cooling salve applied on all of your existential wounds. If you enter the congregation you will be welcomed with open arms, another lost sheep has found his way home, welcome brother! But wait, there’s more! Not only do you have a second family, you also get the answers to all of your problems… for no extra charge!

Seriously though, if you join a faith, the acceptance and the fellowship that accompanies it will overwhelm you. And if you accept the dogma and stop questioning things, then Christianity really does answer all of your problems. In short, it makes you feel happy and secure, even if it isn’t true. Something that makes people feel good can’t be all bad, can it?

**Religion: The Bad**

Unfortunately, when it comes to religion I think that the negative consequences heavily outweigh the good, both in number and importance, (if I didn’t, I guess I’d be a Christian) and so on that note, let’s see what I have to say about the ‘dark’ side.

Delusion

Just above I included the fact that Christianity makes people feel happy even though it’s wrong as a positive, but here I will raise a similar point for the negative. Christianity is wrong… okay, maybe… and in that case I believe that it is not good to follow it, even if it makes you happy.

An example may better serve to illustrate my point. Imagine you wish to learn another language, let’s say Japanese (assuming you, the reader, aren’t Japanese, of course – if you are feel free to substitute any other language you like into the analogy). Now you decide to take lessons from a teacher you have heard about, called Miss Watanabe. Unbeknownst to you, Miss Watanabe also teaches a new language that she herself has invented called Watanese. Currently no one else in the world speaks Watanese. The question is, ‘Is it important to you that she teaches you correct Japanese,’ i.e. the Japanese spoken by those people living in Japan? You will feel the same sense of challenge and achievement if she teaches you real Japanese or Watanese.

If you plan to go to Japan and use Japanese then it will obviously be important to you that she teaches you the real Japanese, however, what if you will never to use it? Would you still be content to learn Watanese?

I doubt it.

Why? You have a purpose for studying Japanese, even if it’s just as a personal goal, and it’s what you have chosen to do. A fake version is not good enough, even if you never plan to use it. This simple thought experiment tells us that the feeling alone of an experience is not good enough for us to be happy, we want authenticity as well. The conclusion is that even though something makes you feel good, it needs to be authentic and real to be truly satisfying. This is why a delusion, even one that makes you feel happy and safe, is ultimately unsatisfying, and not what anyone really wants.

I am basically saying that reality is always more important and more desirable than a delusion, even a delusion that makes you feel good. Hence, people should not bury their heads in the sand and believe in a religion because it makes them happy and gives them a purpose. Ultimately it is better to have no purpose and be thrust into the cold light of reality than to have a fake purpose and counterfeit joy based on the dim, reassuring haze of a lie.

Christianity Breeds Elitism and Separatism

Have you ever watched the professional fighter (in popular ‘sports’ such as K1 and UFC) who attempts to render his opponent senseless by inflicting repeated physical assaults upon his body and head. Sometimes I have had the (mis)fortune of watching such an encounter and have been struck on occasion by the ferocity with which these combatants attack each other. Sometimes they are so intent on obliterating each other that even the bell signalling the end of a round is not enough to deter them. Even worse, at times their opponent is clearly dazed and physically unable to defend himself but rather than easing up, bloodlust seems to take over and the attack redoubles in intensity with the referee eventually being called upon to break it up.

I have often wondered what these ‘athletes’ are thinking at such times. Nevertheless, we shall ignore that enigma and watch as the bout continues until the final bell sounds at which time they hug each other like reunited school chums. Weren’t they just trying to beat each other into unconscious pulps splayed on the canvas? Okay, let’s just accept it so we can move on.

The fight is finally over. There are many moral and character related issues that could have been raised but since these are tangential to the current theme let us set them aside and focus on the final curtain call, as it were. Now (if both parties are still able to stand) the winner will be announced and he will almost certainly trace the symbol of the cross over his body or raise his head skyward and give thanks to God. My big question is what exactly is he giving thanks for? Is he thanking God for making his opponent lose focus at a critical point in the fight and fall prey to his uppercut or is it a more general prayer of thanks, thanking God for helping him pound his opponent into the ground?

Is this the God that Christians believe in, a God who takes sides and gives his ‘team’ that little extra ‘boost’ to give them the edge? Of course it is. We have already confirmed this through the Bible, but for now let’s indulge in a more peaceful example.

Let’s imagine that you are an office worker in line for a promotion… but you are just one of several candidates. If there is an interview for the newly vacated position and you are a ‘good Christian’ what will you do right before you are invited into the meeting room? Why, pray, of course. And what will be the content of your prayer? Maybe it would go something like this:

*Please God give me the wisdom and strength to articulate myself clearly and let me represent myself in a positive light in front of the manager. Please God be with me and help guide me through this interview being my rock as I know you are. Thank you, God. Amen*

There doesn’t seem to be anything particularly terrible about this, unlike the previous example which involved physical violence, but I contend that even a prayer such as this one leads to a distorted and selfish worldview.

First of all, a prayer like this places the Christian in a position of conflict against all the other applicants for the job. It recognises that this is a dog-eat-dog world and it suggests that Christians have an edge over everyone else. It is in other words, implicitly elitist, but more important than this it creates a separatist attitude. This Christian worldview (indeed most religions have a view like this) is a source of disharmony where Christians view the world and everyone in it not as one people, but as being divided into Christians and non-Christians, those going to Heaven and those not. This is hardly a loving, embracing attitude to foster. Of course, we know that Christians do think about the world in this segregated manner but I am just trying to isolate prayer’s relation to that attitude, especially its potential as a possible catalyst.

This idea of separation, of us versus them, creates a lot of intolerance, a trait Christians are well-known for, but one that I think is completely unnecessary. All of us humans are living in the world, doing the best we can, and each of us is fighting our own battles every day. It is not an easy ride and we all battle together to understand it and our role in it. Why weaken ourselves by setting up warring factions within our own ranks?

Essentially, it becomes nothing more than a prejudice, another form of discrimination, not based on race or gender (although sometimes it is this as well) but primarily according to religion. Christians (although most would never admit it) believe they are superior to non-believers because they believe in the ‘one’ God and He will save them on Judgement Day and grant them everlasting happiness. This may not be a fully conscious attitude (and as I said, most would not phrase it his way) but underneath the layers of sugar-coating this is what it boils down to. “I’m going to Heaven, you’re not.” This is an underlying principle of Christianity and in some extreme cases (Jehovah’s Witnesses, Lutherans, etc) they are forbidden from even having friends outside of the Church so as not to be ‘tainted’ by sin. I admit this is extreme and is certainly not the norm, but the fundamental principle underpinning the action is the same in all Christians. “You and I are different.” I think it is probably fair to state that no form of discrimination is positive or conducive to happiness, so then why do we see those who claim to be following the ‘only’ way to happiness practicing it?

Second, it sets the Christian up for a belief in a God who takes sides, a God who is just as separatist and elitist as the Christians themselves. This God is a violent God who will take down opponents to His cause, especially in the first example, to ensure the success of His followers. This is truly the God of the Christians we defined earlier, rather than the Ideal God we imagined. We don’t need to be separatist and we don’t need to model our God on such poor human characteristics.

Christianity Robs Personal Power

What are the first four commandments about? In case you’ve forgotten they are solely about honouring God. In Christianity, humans are nothing compared to God. We are taught that we are terrible, sinning creatures but luckily even we can be saved, thanks to Jesus Christ (but it did take the death of God’s son to redeem such horrible creatures as us). If something good happens for us we must thank God because it was He who gave it to us, if something bad happens to us it is either our fault or the work of the Devil. The Christian role models are portrayed as bowing down before God as if He were a human king, rather than our loving Father.

Christianity can be boiled down to obeying and completely submitting oneself to God. First of all I think a God who demands that level of obeisance is not much of a God, but I understand we are talking about our Christian God so I’ll accept that. Basically what Christianity demands is that the follower completely gives away his or her power. Mindless and total devotion is what is expected. What’s the point of gaining a God if you have to lose yourself in the process?

Extremists and Fundamentalists

Religions have a tendency to incite people to carry things too far. The obvious example is that of the Muslim activists who believe that Allah demands violence from His followers, but Christianity has certainly got plenty of blood on its own hands also.

People who have a certain set of beliefs are one thing but when they start interfering with other people’s rights to do the same, especially violently (as we have seen countless times in history), then things become more of a problem. Religion is notorious for breeding such people and serves as another example why religion as an institution is not a good thing.

God is More Important Than Anything

At the root of Christianity is the teaching that nothing is more important than God and Jesus. Complete and absolute servitude is not just expected, but demanded. Of course, this is highlighted in the story of Abraham preparing to sacrifice his son for his Lord.

Considering the frailties of the human mind and its tendency to twist facts to satisfy our beliefs, this is an extremely dangerous situation. How many people have killed in response to what they saw as a ‘calling from God?’ We have all heard the stories of serial killers murdering people because they thought God was telling them to. What would you do if you truly believed in God and you truly believed He was telling you to kill someone? Would you act like the good Christian, Abraham, and be prepared to go through with it?

Of course, people say that you would know whether it’s really God or not by the content of the message. God would never tell you to kill someone. But he already has! He ordered Abraham to. If Abraham hadn’t been prepared to do it, right to the point of reaching out with his knife to take his son’s life, he would have failed the test. Would you be prepared to fail the test from your Lord?

This is such a dangerous message but you can see why it’s important for an institution that relies on power and control. You must ensure complete obedience and the best way to do that? Stick a story in the Bible showing one of the earliest heroes of Christianity so dedicated to God that he was prepared to sacrifice his own son at His request. If Abraham did it, I guess I should too…?

The obvious danger in an institution that praises ignorance and blind faith while denigrating logic and commonsense combined with such an unfailing obedience to a fictional entity is the potential to be misled, either by less than completely scrupulous people or by an over-zealous imagination. What does this lead to? Holy wars, crusades or maybe just the murders of as many prostitutes as you can before the police catch up to you. Dangerous... and sad.

How about this one? I have heard Christians say that they love Jesus first and their families second! How insane is that! You love a person who is little more than a myth and whose entire biography is encapsulated in a few pages written by anonymous strangers from around two thousand years ago, above your own family?!? You don’t deserve a family!

And what’s even worse than this is the fact that this person would be praised by their church and fellow Christians for their piety. Madness! How would you like to hear your father or mother tell you that you were second best to a person who may or may not have lived a couple of thousand years ago? There’s something inherently wrong with this.

**Why Do Religions Exist?**

Despite all of the ridiculous things that religions posit with zero proof, they are still hugely popular. They continue to thrive irrespective of how many times they are proven wrong or how many wild claims they make, raising people from the dead, splitting the moon in half, talking snakes, burning bushes, etc. Why is this?

Why is it that in this day and age we are probably (as a planet) the most cynical we have ever been at any other time in our history and yet we swallow all manner of nonsense if it comes from a church?

There are, I think, three primary reasons for the continued popularity of religion, even into the modern era.

God of the Gaps

This is an old explanation but a good one. It proposes that God(s) are frequently invented to explain phenomena currently unable to be explained by commonsense or science. This is actually less of a theory and more a fact. We know ancient civilisations saw gods everywhere and explained natural phenomena by appeal to them.

The Egyptians believed in a god called Nut, whose arching body was actually the sky. The god, Geb, was the Earth. They believed that at night Nut and Geb came together and this caused darkness. They also believed that if there was a storm during the day then Nut had come closer to Geb.

The Aztecs believed that the gods controlled the natural forces and needed to be appeased with human sacrifices. If they failed to make these sacrifices the gods would become angry and punish them with storms, plagues or any manner of natural disasters. Does the notion of sacrificing remind you of anyone?

As science and humankind rose above its primitive beginnings we began to understand the world around us more and more. Science displayed its powers of explanation and revealed an ordered, predictable universe not subject to the whims of god(s) or goddesses. Once these forces were understood, the need for the god(s) to explain them became redundant and so they were dropped, in most cases. Few people believe that god(s) control natural forces anymore and yet some people refuse to give up their precious God(s). The god of the gaps theory is only part of the story. There are other stronger and more personal forces at work…

Parental Substitute

As children we are raised and looked after by our parents for a good eighteen years. For that entire period we usually live in our parents’ home and they earn the money that feeds, clothes and supports us. For a good twelve of those years we are completely and totally dependent on our parents. As children we have absolutely zero ability to take care of ourselves. Our parents completely control every aspect of our lives. We eat when they tell us to eat, sleep when they tell us to sleep, wear what they tell us to wear and behave the way they tell us to behave. They are our gods in every sense of the word; they even gave us life and brought us into being.

Life is quite safe and sheltered for those first twenty years. We may have a few bumps along the road at puberty and so on, first loves and homework stress but on the whole, life is pretty simple. We never realise just how simple life was until we are released from the haven that was our home and have to really grow up.

Suddenly bills appear that have to be paid, food no longer miraculously appears on the table at breakfast time, washing no longer gets done just by putting dirty clothes in the basket. A job takes up most of your waking life, you begin interacting with the world as an adult and encounter a wide range of people, some of whom make you happy, others whose sole purpose it seems is to make your life hell, relationships, marriage, children, mortgages, car payments… the list is endless.

One morning you wake up and wonder what happened to those days when all of your needs were taken care of and there was no pain or tribulation that couldn’t be overcome with a hug and a reassuring word from your mother or father. You feel a little lost, a little abandoned… and then you see a poster on the wall of the building you are walking past, groceries in hand. It says, “Your Father is waiting for you.” You realise the building is a church.

I doubt there is a single person out there who doesn’t identify with this story to some degree. Okay, maybe it’s a little dramatic but the point is quite clear and valid. For a good fifteen years of our lives we are taken care of by and look to our parents for advice and guidance and then suddenly, without us fully being aware of it, a massive change takes place, we become adults ourselves and are expected to take care of ourselves. All of a sudden Mr or Mrs Jones is no longer your father or mother… it’s you!

The problem is we don’t always know the right answer or the best thing to do and our parents’ advice is now somewhat removed from us. We are away from their protection and we realise there is a whole world out there that doesn’t care about our parents thoughts, filled with people who have their own thoughts. Cast adrift from our sheltered home and the sanctity of our parents who were truly the gods of their domain, we flounder and keenly feel the pang of separation and the loss of care and control that our parents once gave us.

It’s not just the fact that we’ve lost that sanctuary, we’ve also outgrown it and realise that our parents weren’t gods after all. As we grew up, our questions and trials became more complicated. It wasn’t the issue that the boy from next door called us a “booger” anymore, it was more like, “Why am I here?” Our questions have outgrown our parents now and we need someone even “more godly” to take their place. Religion completely satisfies that need.

This all too human need for a parent to protect and guide us; this longing to have someone looking out for us who can say, “Don’t worry, my child. It will all work out,” is so strong and desperate that even in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary we will continue to believe in our surrogate parent. We will fight before we give up our beliefs but we will die before we give up our God(s). We can’t afford to lose Him/Them. In many cases they’re the rudder that steers the ship of our life and the oars that propel it forward.

Viewed in that light, religion is a crutch that keeps people trapped in weakness. We can defer everything to God. We are safe and protected because God is looking out for us. Some people live their whole lives and never once stand on their own two feet to look life square in the eyes. They live under their parents and then they live under God. It’s an excuse, it’s a desperate grasping at straws to avoid the reality; you *are* alone, *you* are in control, *you* are steering the ship. It sounds scary and depressing at first but then you realise it’s empowering. You aren’t the lamb cowering below decks in the arms of your shepherd, eyes closed, shivering like a baby and hoping the noise above will stop. You’re the gritty sailor standing fiercely at the prow, laughing as the wind blows through your hair and the rain runs down your face. You know there are going to be times when you’re happy, times when you’ll be sad and other times when you’ll be scared to death, but you know you’ll face them all and you know you’ll eventually come out the other end with a big grin on your face.

It comes down to just being real and facing reality – we all have to grow up sooner or later and we’re all the better for it when we finally decide to.

Humans Innate Fear of Death and Being Meaningless

This reason is similar to the last one in that religion addresses a deep, existential concern and allays the fear contained within.

Every human being is afraid of death. I say this because after all other considerations the greatest priority in everyone’s life is their existence. Without this, nothing else matters. Beliefs, hopes, dreams; all of these are useless if there is no, “I” to have them. As far as anyone knows for sure, death is the end of that existence, the only existence we have ever known. Who wouldn’t fear such a cataclysmic event?

Religion appeals to this deepest of fears by promising a joyous afterlife (only for those who believe, of course). How attractive is that! Not only do you not have to worry about losing your existence, you can rest easy with the knowledge that you will be chilling for eternity in Heaven.

However, you have to remember that no one has actually seen Heaven and lived to tell about it. Any so called near death experiences, I reject as evidence simply because they appear too much like dreams to be taken seriously. These kind of ‘spiritual’ experiences always take place while the body is either sleeping or unconscious and as a result are extremely unreliable, and certainly fall outside the bounds of our sensible, logical approach. So, no one actually has any direct evidence or experience of Heaven and yet millions of people around the world believe in it. Why? Because it’s a hell of a lot more comforting to believe that your ‘soul’ will carry on after you die than it is to believe that death is the end.

Those who believe in the afterlife must admit they have absolutely no solid reason for such a belief but will probably say something like, “I feel it in my heart” which is a “proof” I dealt with earlier. Having no solid reason for this belief, we must then ask ourselves whether this belief benefits the person in any way. The answer is a resounding yes. It gets rid of the most terrifying thought for any human being. Death becomes nothing more than a transition, from here to Heaven. Wonderful.

With this in mind, belief in the afterlife is seen for what it really is, a grand deception we all hold up because we’re just too damn scared to let it go. I said earlier that most people are afraid of death and now we can see that someone who clings to an irrational belief in the afterlife, and so would say they are unafraid of death, is actually the *most* fearful, because rather than face it as something unknown and unknowable, they have bought into a wondrous fantasy to avoid it.

I’m not saying here that death is the end, blackness, I’m just accepting the fact that we don’t know what the hell it is. To face the unknown with unflinching honesty, that is real courage, to make up lies to console yourself is true cowardice.

The other desperately existential question that almost every human will confront more than once during their life is the big one, “What is the meaning of life?” From our unbelievably tiny and insignificant perspective, we wonder about this mystery of mysteries and contemplate our place in the universe. We long for some kind of purpose to give us meaning, for we are aware that everything of worth must have a purpose and it is unimaginable that our lives have no meaning and therefore no worth.

The answer to the question constantly eludes our grasp (it wouldn’t be *the* question otherwise) and so we are forced to turn from sense and reason, because they fail to give us the answer we seek, and instead rely on imagination and fantasy. What is the answer we’re seeking? Anything that confirms our belief that we are special somehow, that our lives have greater meaning than that of our animal cousins. What gives us that answer? Religion.

All of a sudden, we have a purpose. “I am here to do God’s work. I am here to fulfil what God wants me to do – and in the process I’ll glorify His name.” Perfect, isn’t it? Yes, it is perfect unless you’re actually concerned with finding the real answers to your questions and not hiding behind mirages that mask reality. A belief in God is only for those who feel that they can’t give any meaning to their own lives.

How far will people go to maintain this illusion that gives their life purpose and order? Actually, as far as I can see, there is no limit to how far people will go. Those so desperately afraid of facing their existentiality will deny everything, including commonsense and their own experience, both of which refute any claim that a God exists looking after His chosen people. They will cower behind the religious edifice they have built around themselves and bury their heads in the sand to avoid any possibility of accepting that the meaning of life may be anything less than Divine.

Why do you think the creation stories are so important to Christians? Why do you think the church maintained that Earth was at the centre of the universe until science pulled them down from their pedestal, amidst much gnashing of teeth? Because these things confirmed that humanity was the greatest of God’s creations. We were special, we had a purpose and it was Divine, God Himself promised that we were something. What a seductive idea.

And so, Christians will never give up their faith because to do so would be to tear down the walls they have built around themselves to shelter them from the (sometimes) harsh realities that just don’t care one way or the other when we plead our humanity and deny our mortality.

**Additional Thoughts**

Do People who Believe the Bible is Gospel Treat it That way?

How many different versions of Christianity are there? You wouldn’t be far wrong if you guessed that there are as many Christian belief systems as there are believers in them. And the same could be said for almost any other religious/spiritual following. Okay, you caught me in an exaggeration (something I never do!) but you can see what I’m saying, right? How many times have you heard a Christian or Muslim or Buddhist or new-ager say, “I think…” or “I disagree with…”?

There’s actually nothing wrong with that and I totally believe that people *should* formulate their own opinions about this kind of thing. But what we must remember is that this is exactly what we are doing; forming our own opinions. There is nothing ‘gospel’ about an interpretation, nothing ‘sacred’ about an opinion.

These people are reading the Bible and essentially picking and choosing what they want to believe and more importantly what they are going to follow. Now, as I said, I don’t have a problem with that, but how can these people still believe the Bible is the Word of God while they’re ignoring half of it? Don’t preach to me about how sacred the Bible is and how it’s God’s Word when your actions say the opposite.

As I mentioned earlier, God makes it quite clear how important ritual sacrifices are to Him. He specifies in great detail (more than anything else, in fact) how these sacrifices are to be prepared and executed yet there is not a soul alive today who follows these instructions. God is quite clear about how He finds homosexuality repulsive. All you homosexuals don’t even have a chance of getting into Heaven. Of course, the biggest and craziest part of the Bible is the blatant and unashamed sexism that permeates from the beginning of the Old Testament right to the end of the New Testament. If women want to live according to the Bible, they must remember that the man is the head of the family and they should not talk in church for it is not their place to do so. This is just a tiny sample of what is in the Bible that people make excuses for or just plain ignore, all the while telling everyone (including themselves!) that the Bible is God’s Word. How can you pick and choose what you want to believe from God’s Word? Do you think He will accept that? If you do, you’re already making up stories for yourself, because the God in the Bible is quite clearly absolutely intolerant of anything less than total devotion.

If God gave you a text full of His infinite wisdom there shouldn’t be any need for you to voice your own puny opinion. Just do what your God tells you to do! Read the Bible, believe it *is* Gospel and follow it… or don’t. But don’t try and do both, or you’ll end up doing neither. Either accept that it’s not the Word of God and you have to interpret it and discern the ‘Way’ for yourself or believe it is the Word of God in which case your own feeble interpretations and excuses are completely unnecessary. Don’t make a hypocrite of yourself.

The Rise of Religion Means the Fall of Scientific Progress

If religion rises to the position of power and authority it once used to have, we will have to bid farewell to all of the benefits of the modern age. Some of you out there may welcome this situation with open arms claiming that scientific progress has brought us many evils including the means to destroy most living creatures on the planet in a single afternoon. This attitude isn’t totally wrong, but it is hopelessly backwards.

Yes. Science has brought us some negatives but to look only at these, is to completely miss the bigger picture. Science has brought us some powerful positives as well. The advances we have made in the last century alone have eradicated a lot of disease, effectively shrunk our planet, increased our productive capabilities and increased our knowledge many, many times over. To campaign against science because of the negatives is like campaigning against dentists because of the pain they cause.

In addition to the benefits science brings we should be mindful of the fact that it is not science which brings evil, but people wielding that science irresponsibly or recklessly that causes problems. We would be much better off, not attempting to inhibit scientific progress, but attempting to make people more responsible and mature in dealing with and using it. A knife can be used by a mother to cut an apple into pieces for her children or by a criminal to stab someone in a darkened street. Prohibiting knives is not the solution to that problem.

Some others may wonder if we can’t have scientific progress with religion. Why must they necessarily be opposed and mutually exclusive? I touched on this point a little earlier. Religion assumes entire mythical places with mythical figures performing mythical feats that run completely counter to scientific thought. Not only that, it often encroaches on scientific territory, as it has done before and from which it has had to backpedal centuries later.

The problem is that the situation is not as clear-cut as some people would wish it to be. The people who dream of a union between science and religion have missed a fundamental point. They think that science deals with matter while religion deals with things of a more metaphysical nature. Science looks after the body and religion looks after the soul. At a cursory glance this may be true but if you dig a little deeper you will see that there is more to the picture than this attitude suggests.

Religion is much more than just metaphysical in nature. Its postulates and ‘theories’ will always encroach on the physical. We have seen this a number of times in history from the belief that the Earth is the centre of the universe to the belief that the Earth is only 6,000 years old and evolution is a myth.

While science can’t encroach on religion to quite the same extent (just because scientific theories demand proof and evidence which validates them in ways that religious ideas are totally unfamiliar with) there is an even bigger problem ensuring the two will never join. They are more than just disciplines, each specialising in a certain field, they are whole mindsets. They represent completely different paradigms, completely different ways of looking at the world and life. Science insists on practical, logical, provable theories, while religion is capable of admitting virtually any idea, irrespective of evidence or the likelihood of its occurrence. One worships cold, unforgiving logic while the other worships myth and fantasy. These two will never unite, not because their interests overlap and their conclusions conflict but because their worldviews and attitudes are complete anathema to each other.

That explains why science and religion cannot peacefully co-exist but I just want to be a little clearer about why I think science must suffer if religion becomes too powerful. Think about the advances that have been made in medicine in the last fifty to one hundred years. Would we ever have bothered if we truly believed that God was controlling everything and could heal us if we just prayed hard enough and were good?

All scientific disciplines would be seriously hampered if we kept trying to interpret discoveries in terms of a benevolent Creator. Would it be a mystery that fossils have been found and dated at millions of years in age? Would we wonder why Ptolemy’s Earth-centred solar system was showing some odd inaccuracies when compared to our observations? The even bigger question is would we be *allowed* to wonder? Remember that religion discourages the asking of questions because it is a sinful practice which will eventually open up gaping holes in the facade of myths that religion builds around itself.

But can’t science progress with people still looking for answers while believing that God perhaps set the ball rolling but has let it keep rolling on its own since that time? No. As I said before, that’s impossible. Eventually you will reach a point (and it may be earlier in the process than you think) where the scientist will want to look for a reason, while the religious believer will be content with the explanation that “God did it.”

Not just that, but you’re forgetting that the attitude the scientist thrives on will never allow for a God to have started things off (unless he can measure this ‘starting off,’ of course). The scientist will always be opposed to the believer and vice versa.

The scientist is always looking to the facts for his answers while the believer is always looking to the heavens for his. With one keeping his head buried in facts and figures and the other holding his head in the clouds, the two just have no chance to meet. This is not regrettable; it’s just the way it is. If it were any different then science wouldn’t be science and religion wouldn’t be religion.

The Role of Fear in Religion

You know, one day I was sitting in the park reading a book and a Christian guy came over to me and initiated a conversation. I (perhaps foolishly) decided to indulge this young man and I was astonished at what I heard.

The basis of the man’s quite well-rehearsed speech was fear. The central tenet of what he had to say revolved around the concept of, “what if you’re wrong?” What if there is a God and Heaven and Hell really exist? What if it’s true?

He even had a four or five page pamphlet of a comic strip which depicted the life of a guy who lived without religion because he wanted to drink and have sex and indulge in various other fun sins. Then he died and, surprise surprise; he was sent to Hell. I’ll always remember the last frame in the pamphlet which showed the man in Hell with a thought bubble ruefully saying something to the effect of, “Why didn’t I believe when I had the chance?”

This, although a true story, (the story about the man with the comic strip, not the comic strip itself) is probably a little extreme, but serves to illustrate well the role that fear plays in religion. If you start down that winding path you’ll find yourself inundated with doctrine heavily centred on fear; fear of the devil, fear of sin, even fear of God! Everything is fearful to Christians. They masquerade it with strong words, “God is my shepherd, I do not fear Satan” and so on, but the truth is they’re deathly afraid. Why else would they flock to a concept that has absolutely zero foundation in proven fact and is completely illogical?

Of course no Christian would admit that fear plays a role in their worship but the fact is that it does and anything that holds fear as one of its central tenets cannot be good. As I mentioned above, I suspect that the fear of death and the fear of a meaningless existence are what keeps religion alive even though God continually fails to do anything, even for those who fervently believe.

How about the term, ‘godfearing?’ Have you heard that before? Can you believe that this has become something that Christians declare with pride? When I first heard this, even as an adolescent, I was completely stunned. How could anyone fear God? Why would you need to fear God? He loves us! How naïve I was.

This goes back to our definitions of God. If you choose to believe in the Christian God then you had damn well better be godfearing because that guy’s freakin’ scary! He’s not just satisfied with tormenting you. If you make Him angry, He’s going after your children, and your children’s children. In Matthew 10 this is Jesus’ advice concerning God, “But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” That about sums it up.

To me, this shows just how far Christians have drifted from anything resembling commonsense. The whole definition they have of God is far better suited to a human tyrant than the Creator of the universe. I sometimes wonder if the line in Genesis where God says He (They) created man in His (Their) image and likeness actually should be read in reverse; man created God in his own image and likeness.

I can’t help but be reminded of Kings and Queens in the middle ages who ruled over their subjects with stupid mandates like bowing before them in their presence, not making eye contact and backing out of the room so as to avoid turning their backs on royalty. I also think of King Henry VIII and in particular his relationship with his wives. If they failed to live up to his expectations (i.e. provide a male heir) or he tired of them, they were in trouble. Sounds a lot like the God of the Christians who constantly needs to be praised and worshipped and demands payment in blood for breaching His rules, even if that blood turns out to be His own son’s.

The Grand Delusion

Christians are incredibly guilty of deluding themselves. We have already discussed why they maintain the facade but I just want to take the time here to look at a couple of examples to reinforce the point.

I once saw a clip on the news where the reporter had gone to a town somewhere in America after a tornado had swept through. There was one incredibly fortunate person who grabbed the microphone and announced with great passion, “Thank the Lord, He saved me and my family.” Apparently the tornado had torn the roof off his neighbour’s house but left his untouched. A true miracle, right? Hardly. It’s twisted thinking and distorted logic like this that reinforces Christian’s misguided notions that there is a God somewhere looking out for them.

Why do I think this is distorted logic? Just ask the guy next to the Christian, whose house was torn apart by the twister. Why didn’t God protect his house? Is he a terrible sinner who deserved what he got?

The problem is that Christians take a positive and attribute it to God but ignore the negatives. This one-sided thinking allows Christians to continue in their confident ignorance. They focus on the man whose house was saved rather than the hundreds who lost their houses and the poor people who lost loved ones.

The Christian gets a raise at work and thanks God for His protection while one hundred starving children in Ethiopia die in the time it took for the boss to convey the good news. You can’t be a Christian and a clear thinker at the same time. The two are mutually exclusive.

Christians don’t just misrepresent things like this which maybe aren’t so obvious, i.e. when the negatives occur to other people, but they even delude themselves in their own lives. They pray to God for something and two days later, like a miracle, it happens. “Oh, thank you God,” our Christian gushes, his faith reaffirmed, but he ignores the last five times he prayed for something and it didn’t happen. More one-sided thinking.

Christians aren’t the only ones guilty of deluding themselves like this. *All* religions and *all* new age spiritual movements do exactly the same thing. It’s time to get real with ourselves even though it may not be the perfect reality we would have liked. One moment lived in reality is better than a hundred moments lived in delusion.

The Great Irony

What I’ve called the great irony is the amazing fact that in Christianity we have a God, a Being perfect in every aspect… who we should not try to emulate. Surely, if God is so wonderful (and He is supposed to be the most wonderful possible), then wouldn’t it be perfect if we were exactly like Him? Whether we can actually achieve such a goal is completely irrelevant (and no Christian would dare suggest that we could ever become like God) but if it were possible that should be the ultimate in perfection, shouldn’t it?

So, why do I say we should not try and emulate God?

Well, for all of the reasons I outlined earlier in our discussion about the nature of God. I used several examples where if we were to act towards our children the way God acts towards us, we would be locked up as unfit parents:

* God kills his children when they disobey Him
* He threatens to punish several generations of those who break His laws
* If He doesn’t kill those who disobey Him, He punishes them overly-harshly, Eve must endure extremely painful childbirth and both her and Adam are kicked out of home
* He loves only those who love Him
* He sends good people (even though they haven’t given their lives to Jesus) to Hell
* He judges (even Jesus admonishes against judging)
* He demands worship from those less than Him
* He holds grudges so ferociously that the only way they can be lifted is through the sacrifice of His own son; someone must pay. Is this Divine forgiveness?

How can it be that the ultimate in goodness and perfection, acts in ways that would be unconscionable for us to act? The answer is simple. It can’t be. As far as I’m concerned this is just more proof that religion is an institution built on lies and maintained with more lies.

Faith

Christianity, like all religions, is based solely on faith. This is its strongest feature and Christians make good use of it. The idea that Christianity must be taken on faith has become something that Christians are proud of; they feel they have the faith that sensible people don’t have, as if that is a worthy trait.

This is a classic example of how religions take negatives and turn them into positives through mass brain-washing. Christians have faith and believe in something that is so ridiculous, no sensible, clear thinking person would ever even consider it as anything more than a myth. It sounds great when the Bishops and Pastors tell you that you are part of the chosen few who will be rewarded for your faith, but in reality, it proves nothing more than your gullibility. To have faith in something that is so obviously a fairytale is not praiseworthy, it’s stupidity! ‘Faith’ has become a positive sounding word for ‘wishful thinking’ or ‘gullible.’ The Church has worked its magic on this word in much the same they did for the word, ‘heresy.’

It also works on another level; it protects the Church from criticism. If religion is all about faith, if that is the magic ingredient, then logic and reason are no longer effective tools to analyse it with. This is lucky because, if you do use reason, as I hope this book as shown, religion comes up looking pretty foolish.

Christians even maintain that one shouldn’t ask too many questions about Christianity. Asking the hard questions is discouraged because they know that if one digs too deep the gaping holes in religion start to become apparent. It always comes back to the idea that, “You have to have faith.”

The ‘Science’ of Creationism

Can you believe that some Christians are trying to get creationism taught in schools alongside evolution as a possible alternative?

As I’ve already mentioned several times, I don’t want to drift into realms where we are forced to take someone else’s opinion on subjects we need a doctorate to fully understand and the potential therefore exists for misleading facts to be presented, so let’s keep it simple.

The most common claim from these people is that evolution is just a theory, the ‘theory of evolution,’ which therefore shouldn’t be taught as fact and their own theory, creationism, should be allowed equal air time.

Okay, first of all, let’s assume what they say is correct; the ‘theory of evolution’ is just a theory. It’s still the only theory we have. Creationism is not a theory, it’s a fantasy. Creationism hasn’t been derived from any observable phenomena or thought about scientifically; it hasn’t even been considered sensibly. It’s a religious idea that came from tall tales told about the beginning of the universe back in the days when people didn’t even know what the sun was. Shall we start teaching Islamic and Buddhist beliefs about creation in schools as well, or let’s go all out and start teaching that the Earth is the centre of the universe again. Let’s face it, every religion and every culture has an origin myth often codified in a sacred text. If we admit creationism as a valid theory then we no longer have the right to deny any one of these other beliefs from having their stories taught in school as possible alternatives to evolution. Crazy.

Let’s leave science in schools and keep fairytales for bedtime stories.

The other thing is that evolution is much more than a theory although the name, ‘theory’ has stuck. Compare it to Einstein’s relativity theory. Is that just a theory as well? Are Christians still waiting for proof that gravity exists or do they think that every time an apple falls to the ground it’s because God is pulling it down?

There is an overwhelming amount of evidence supporting evolution and as such, it is an undeniable fact. The most simple example and clear proof that evolution occurs is something that everyone is very much aware of and has become common knowledge. Bacteria.

Everybody knows that these insidious little characters which God created to torment us with, evolve to become resistant or immune to our antibiotics. It’s so obvious you may not have even linked it with evolution. When people think of evolution they tend to think of apes and humans and millions of years, but *everything* evolves all the time, even bacteria. No one doubts this evolution takes place in bacteria but people generally overlook its importance and relevance to all forms of biology.

Bacteria are the perfect place to study evolution because they have an incredibly fast generation time (the length of time it takes to go from one generation to the next), sometimes as little as a few minutes. This means that they show accelerated rates of evolution compared to humans who have a generation time of at least twenty years. We have a rare chance to see ‘evolution in action.’ And we do see it.

Have you ever been immunised against the flu? I have, and it worked… for one season. What happened? Why did my immunisation ‘run out?’ It didn’t, but by next season the flu virus had evolved into a new strain, one that my immune system didn’t recognise. That is why there is no single cure for the common cold; because there is no single cold virus. They are continually evolving into different strains. They have to in order to survive. If evolution was false, bacteria and viruses would all have died out a long time ago.

Relativity theory offers a perfect analogy, because for around 250 years before it, the world believed in Newton’s gravitational theory. There was abundant proof that gravity existed (just drop a pencil and see what happens), so when Einstein proposed his new theory, scientists didn’t start to question gravity, but looked closer to understand the differences between the two and seeing the benefits in both came to a fuller understanding of this force. The question was not whether gravity exists, but how it operates and what rules it follows.

In exactly the same way, evolution is an undeniable fact. There is too much evidence pointing directly to it to deny it, but there is still some scientific debate going on. What is the nature of this debate? Like gravity, the questions are not whether it exists but details about how it works.

Does Creationism have the same evidence behind it? No, of course not. The only thing Creationists have is a hare-brained, glorified folktale that they are now trying to prove with all the quasi-scientific means at their disposal. As with all religious ‘theories’ they start with the answer, invariably from the Bible, and then set about trying to prove it using ‘selective science’ (including all half-baked claims that could possibly indicate their theory is half true and excluding all other research) all the while. This is the exact opposite of science. As I’ve said before, science is the quest for truth; religious pseudo-science is the quest for proof.

Bottom line: Evolution is fact. There is not a single scientist who doesn’t accept it. And that means something. Christian’s sometimes claim, “Everyone used to think the Earth was flat, too. They were all wrong, they can be wrong again.” That is a fair comment and I agree completely that science is not infallible but when people thought the Earth was flat, that wasn’t science. It was completely wild speculation rooted in fear (sounds more like Christianity to me). Don’t forget that when people believed this, there was no ‘science’ as we know it today. Science involves making a hypothesis to explain some phenomena and then testing that hypothesis in some way. The theory that the Earth was flat was rooted in folklore and ignorance.

This theory falls into the same category as people believing everything revolved around the Earth. And we all know how much of an embarrassment that was for Christianity. This idea did at least seem to match observations but as science developed it quickly failed to stand up to more detailed astronomical observations. So what did we do? Did we scrap the scientific revolution and revert back to the belief that God moves everything? Thank god we didn’t! Although that’s what the Church wanted. We analysed and calculated and provided overwhelming evidence that things do move, just not in the way we had previously imagined.

Science is certainly not perfect and new ideas are required to furnish a high degree of proof before they are accepted, especially if they go against commonly held notions and beliefs; but that is the way it should be. Because our beliefs are no longer based on folktales but rigorous calculations and experiments, we have a lot of evidence backing our claims. To knock those claims down requires an awful lot of proof, proof beyond a reasonable doubt. Creationists, holding their bible and ranting nonsense, continually fail to deliver that proof because it doesn’t exist. They keep looking to the past searching for the Holy Grail that will prove their claim about how humankind was formed without realising that that they’re looking in the wrong direction.

**Epilogue**

Well, you’ve made it. We’re at the 68,000 word mark (approximately) and it’s been an interesting trip, has it not? I hope that I’ve succeeded in presenting a few new ideas, challenging a few beliefs that slipped past your filter without question and hopefully stimulating a deeper thought on the subject than you may have entertained before.

In parting, I’d just like to impress on you the importance of thinking critically and seriously about issues such as religion. Our beliefs are the things that we cherish the most and so they should be. We can change virtually everything about ourselves without changing who we are, but our beliefs more than anything else go right to our cores. They motivate us, they give us meaning and purpose, they define us. Don’t you owe it to yourself to make sure that you’ve adopted beliefs that do you justice?

Is a belief in a Supreme Deity plausible? Is it reasonable? Or is it just wishful thinking? What are you basing your faith on? If you are basing it on just that, faith, then I would suggest that your energy and focus could be better directed.

Are you content to close your eyes in prayer to a God who has never answered a single one of those prayers? How do I know He hasn’t answered you? I too have asked my share of questions and listened to the silence that followed them. Or will you open your eyes and boldly step forward to embrace, not the phantom arms of a mythical God, but the solid, tangible reality that is patiently sitting right in front of you.

God’s existence doesn’t glorify Him, it glorifies us. Who told you that God was real? Who told you God was looking after you? I am certain it was a human. I am also certain that another human told them and I’m just as certain that the chain goes on like this back to the human who first started the rumour. Think about it. Humans started a concept which ends in glorification for the human race (at least, the good ones). Isn’t that just a little suspicious? If God turns out to be false, He won’t care. Humans will be the only ones to suffer. Without God breathing His Divine spark into us (well, man anyway), we are just tiny, insignificant mortal creatures drifting alone on an insignificant planet coming from nowhere special and going nowhere in particular.

Does that scare you? It should. It’s a scary thought. But you now have a choice. You can let that fear control you and shepherd you into the warm, comforting shelter of a house made of myth and founded on illusion or you can stand up, shout your independence and courage into the dark, uncaring universe and define your life for yourself.

Perhaps that’s the great lesson here, that we no longer need God to define us. We have outgrown our ancestors and their primitive beliefs. Let us now shed the weight of our collective delusions and boldly reclaim our lives. God has served His purpose. He got us to where we are today but now He’s holding us back, keeping us curled up, weak and in His shadow. Maybe, just maybe, if we try and stand up we will find out that we can be bigger than we ever imagined. Maybe, just maybe, we truly don’t need God anymore.

Let’s find out.

1. Of course, atheism is not a ‘creed’ or set of principles that can be espoused and followed. The positive side of atheism contains no dogma. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. By the way, I’m not trying to tell you what would make your life meaningful. Only you can decide that. I am merely saying that there are some parameters you must observe if you are going to succeed in creating a meaningful existence. The primary one of these is that you not slip under the veil of an illusion. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Although I will investigate a claim that could be made for a God such as this later. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Note that, at the moment I am only considering direct, personal evidence from God of His existence. My point is that if God is a real entity with a real interest in sharing a personal relationship with each of us, we shouldn’t have to look to indirect evidence as proof of His existence. Later we will look at some of the indirect evidence and see how close they get us to a confirming a belief in God. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. I think some propositions in mathematics will make a liar out of me in this statement. But with regards to religion I stand by my claim. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. It was in this creed that it was also firmly established that Jesus was the son of God. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. This is a classic example of the Church inventing an official sounding word to describe something ludicrous. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. This is of course another compelling argument against the whole God case. Why would God in His infinite wisdom, when He finally decides to visit us after watching us flounder around for a few million years, choose to appear in person to a small, illiterate tribe and then send his son back to the same place? Why would He ignore the rest of the world, particularly the much vaster and more advanced India and China. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. A Christian might accuse me of being overly cynical here. It sounds like I am suggesting that the concept of Hell was cunningly contrived by dishonest Church fathers. In fact, whether this was the case or not is irrelevant although I tend to suspect that it was probably a mixture of the theodicean and practical requirements of building theological coherency and enforcing religious doctrine. For our present discussion, I have purposely not gone into this but have restricted myself to considering the effect that a belief in Hell has on believers, and it is undeniably a powerful motivator, however and for whatever purpose it was conceived. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Which we routinely do by the way, when we hear that Muslims believe Allah will give everyone their own mansion in paradise, or how Buddhists believe that if we are bad in this lifetime we may be reincarnated as an insect. Christianity however, has morphed into an ideological virus immune from our typical commonsense antibodies. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. This kind of argument attempts to show that a series of premises lead to a logically absurd consequence and one of them must therefore be false. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Thanks to the principle of the conservation of energy and that famous equation equating matter and energy, E=mc2 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Don’t get sidetracked here into wondering how these forces can become intrinsic to particles in the first place, we’ll tackle this in the next section. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Don’t be distracted here by the question of what started the Big Bang, we’ll tackle this in the next section, too. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. And make no mistake, despite the claims of some misguided scientists, religion and science are polar opposites and ne’er the twain shall meet. More on this later. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Dostoevsky’s devil in The Brothers Karamazov makes this very point while talking to Ivan during a particularly vivid hallucination. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Although I would consider the last two points to be obviously true. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)